Shiwo Komeyama

9

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS 9

Shiwo Komeyama

BLOODY CROSS

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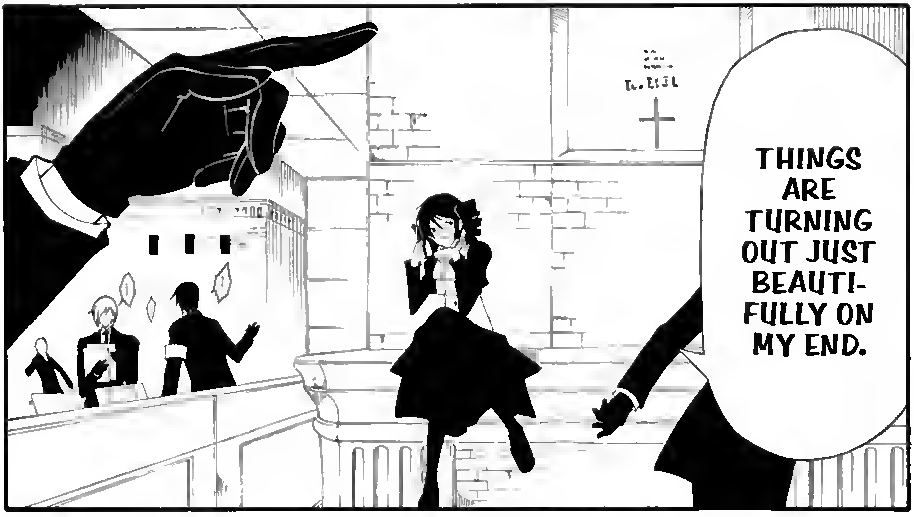
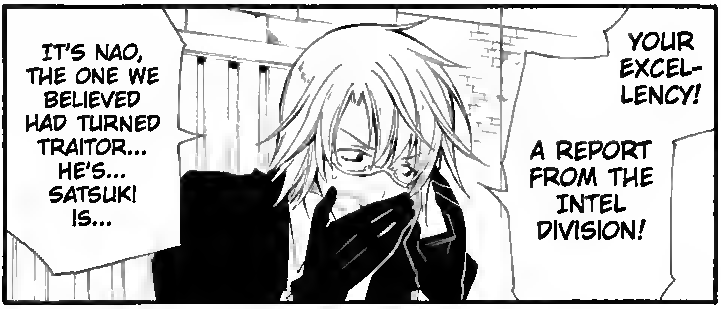
HELLO?
IT'S ME.


THINGS ARE TURNING OUT JUST BEAUTIFULLY ON MY END.

HEE!
♡


YOUR EXCELLENCY!
A REPORT FROM THE INTEL DIVISION!
IT'S NAO, THE ONE WE BELIEVED HAD TURNED TRAITOR... HE'S... SATSUKI IS...

TSUZUKI AND KAMUHABURI'S TOKIWA ARE ENGAGED IN BATTLE AT SITE "B"...
SHALL WE PROVIDE SUPPORT?

HUH? ALREADY?
...SO HE COULDN'T TURN BACK.
MESSING WITH NAO WAS WELL WORTH IT...
NOW THAT ALL THE FUN TARGETS ARE GONE.
...WELL, I SUPPOSE SO.
...MM.
TON (HOP)
VERY WELL.
LET'S...
...MEET AT THE LOCATION I'M ABOUT TO GIVE YOU...

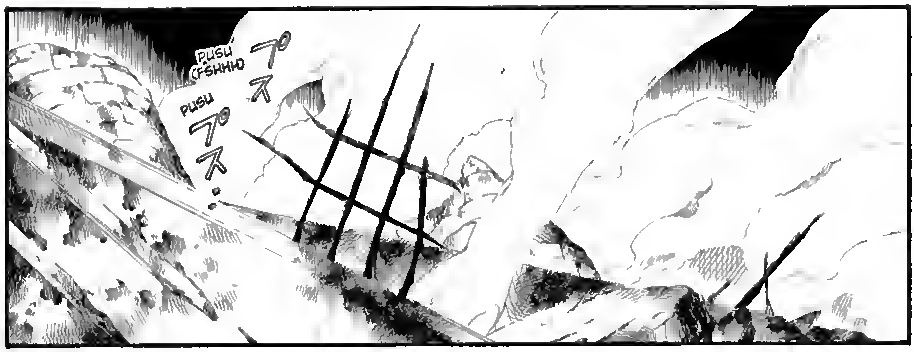
UNH...
PACHI (BLINK)
ぱち

...OH!

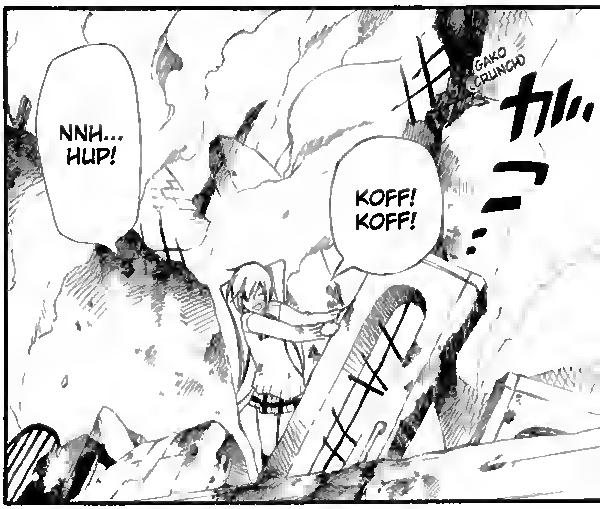
...OW.
HUH? WHAT AM I DOING LYING ON THE GROUND IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?

...THAT'S RIGHT.
THAT FOOL DID SOME-THING TO ME...

...NAO, THAT BAS-TARD.
THE HECK IS HE THINKING !?


PUSU (FSHHH)
PUSU
プス
プス!

KYORO (SEARCH)
キョロ
SA-TSU-KI...


GAKO (CRUNCH)
NNH... HUP!
KOFF! KOFF!

Chapter 43
Choices

SATSU-
KI!

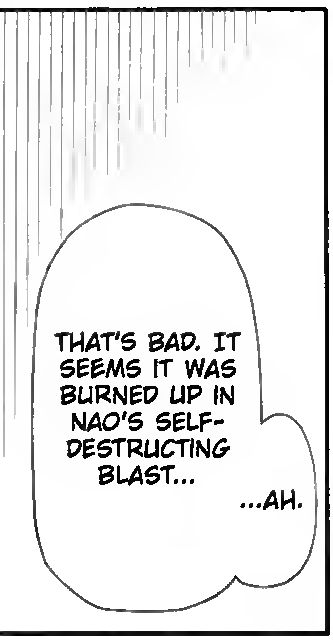
!
IS
NAO...?

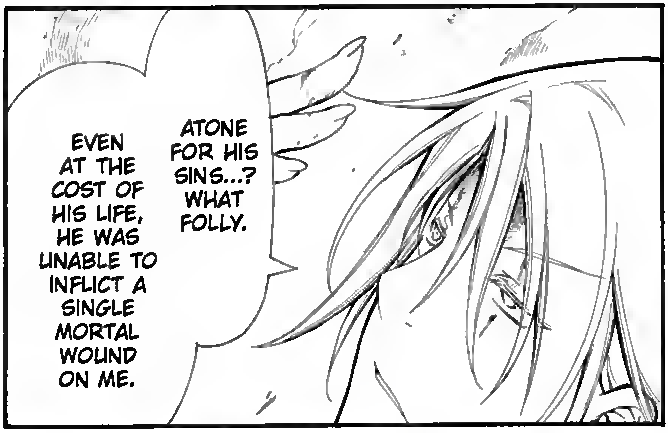
SA-
TSU-
KI!
ARE
YOU
OKAY?
ZAZA
(SKSH)

ZARA
(FZSHH)

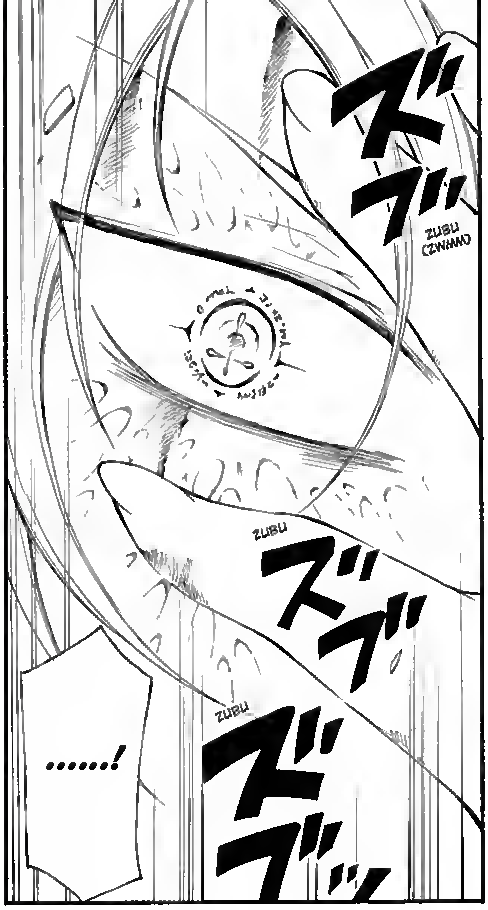
HYO!
(LIFT)
A-
AN
ARM
...!

NAO'S DEAD.
ZAA GNOOSHD

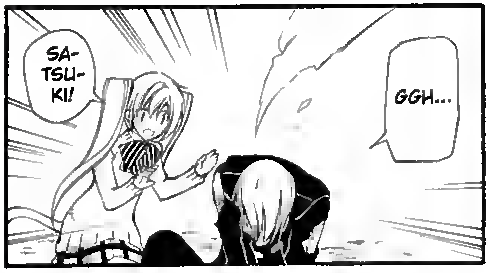

THAT'S BAD. IT SEEMS IT WAS BURNED UP IN NAO'S SELF-DESTRUCTING BLAST...
...AH.


EVEN AT THE COST OF HIS LIFE, HE WAS UNABLE TO INFLICT A SINGLE MORTAL WOUND ON ME.
ATONE FOR HIS SINS...? WHAT FOLLY.

EYE-PATCH ...?
AH!
...SA-TSU-KI! YOUR EYE-PATCH IS GONE!

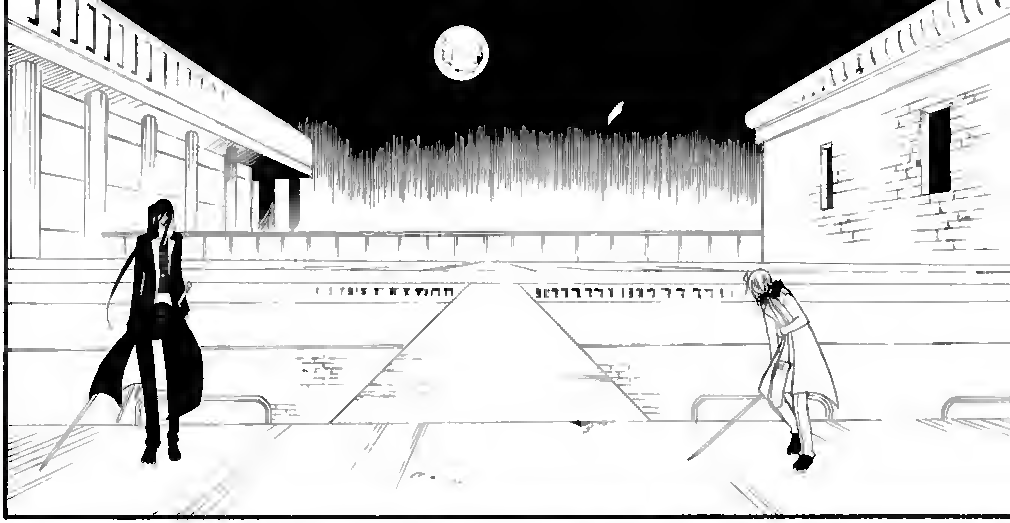

ズゴ
ZUGO (CRUNCH)
ZUBU
ズブ
ZUBU
ズブッ
.....!

ZUN (THROB)


SA-TSU-KI!
GGH...

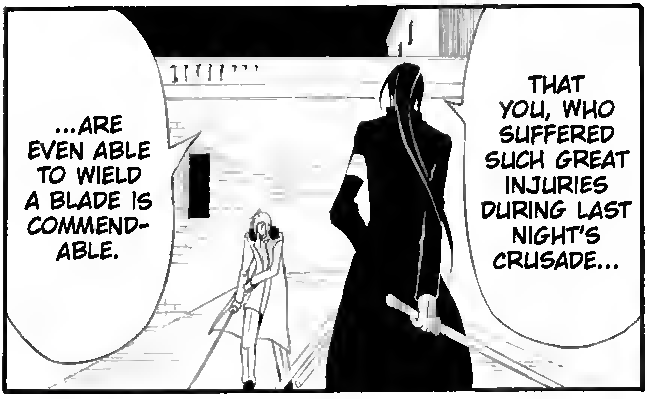
...NAO...
YOU COULD'VE AT LEAST TAKEN THIS RIGHT EYE ALONG WITH THE PATCH AND GIVEN ME HOPE.

I'M NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO DIE UNTIL I BECOME GOD.
...WELL, I SHOULD'VE KNOWN.
PON (PAT)
...HOW INFURI-ATING!
GIRI (GRIT)

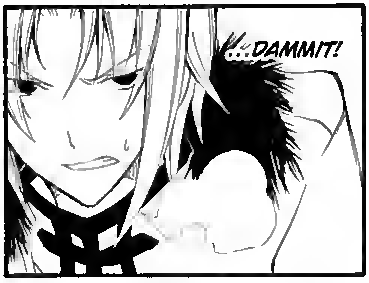


AN HOUR HAS PASSED SINCE THE CRUSADE STARTED.
ONE O'CLOCK ...

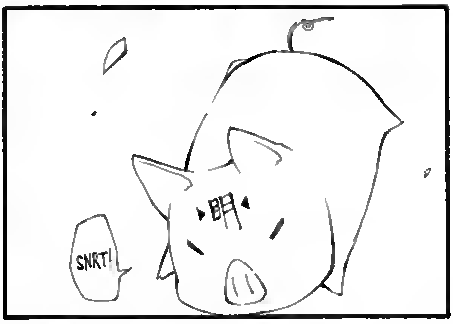
HAFF ...


...ARE EVEN ABLE TO WIELD A BLADE IS COMMEND-ABLE.
THAT YOU, WHO SUFFERED SUCH GREAT INJURIES DURING LAST NIGHT'S CRUSADE...

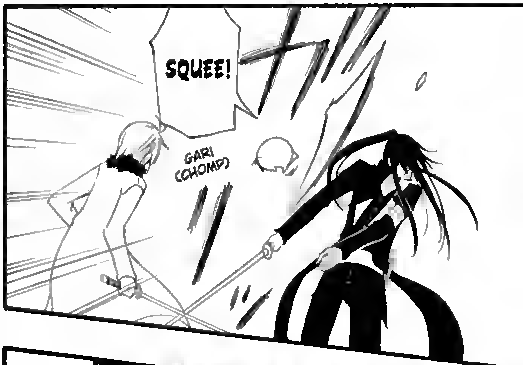
IF I JUST HAD THAT DIVINE RELIC HE STOLE FROM ME... I COULD SAVE NAO!
GU (GRIP)


...DAMMIT!

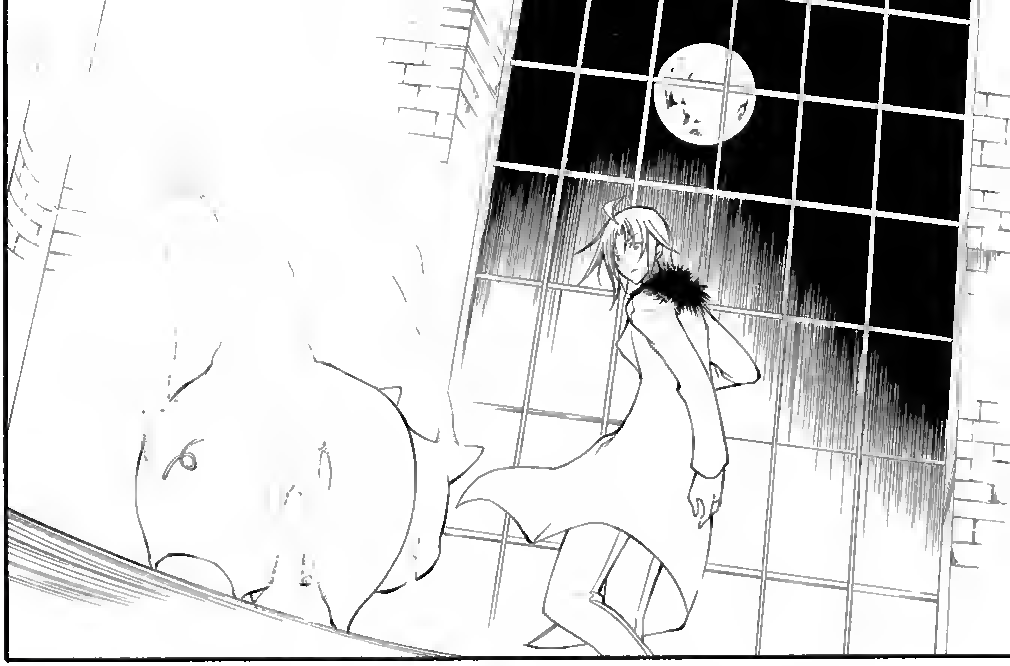
TA (DASH)
.....
(GIN (CLANG)
GAGIN (KACHING)
...YOU!
I'VE NO CHOICE... FOR NOW I'LL RENDER YOU UNCONSCIOUS...
...AND TAKE YOU PRISONER.
SATSUKI ORDERED US TO KILL YOU, BUT...
...THAT'S PROBLEMATIC FOR ONE OF THE KAMUHABURI.



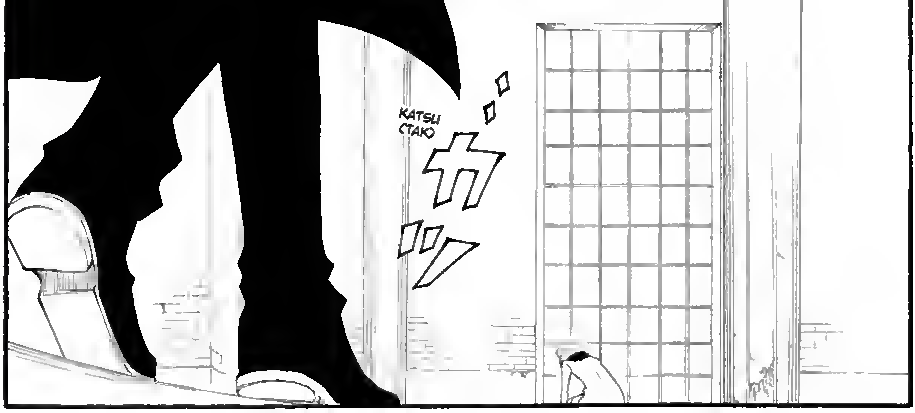
SYMBOL: LUMINOUS



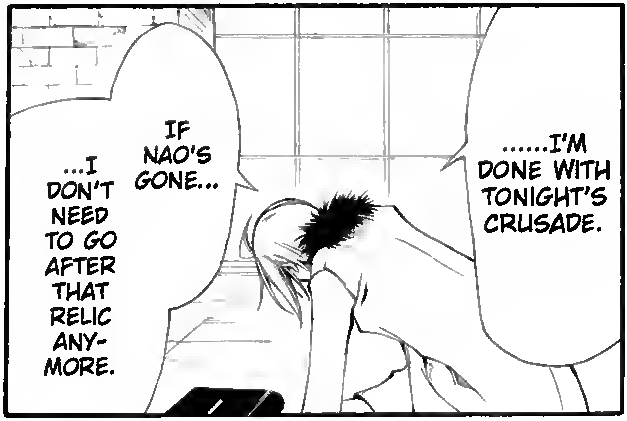
HAAH...
SO YOU'RE NAO'S PIG, EH?
HM?
A NOTE? FROM NAO?
LET'S SEE...
"URGENT MISSIVE."
KASA (RUSTLE)
"I'M INSIDE SATSUKI'S RESIDENCE. RELEASING LUMINOUS BEAST WITHOUT DRAWING HIS ATTENTION.
"I'VE INSTRUCTED IT TO BRING WHATEVER IT FINDS, IF ANYTHING, TO YOU ALONG WITH THIS NOTE.
"THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.
"I'LL HEAD BACK AFTER I'VE KILLED SATSUKI."
...WHA...!?
TH-THAT IDIOT!
BA (LEAP)
YOU CAN'T KILL SATSUKI ALL BY YOURSELF!
HEY, PIG!
TAKE ME TO THIS PLACE WHERE SATSUKI'S—



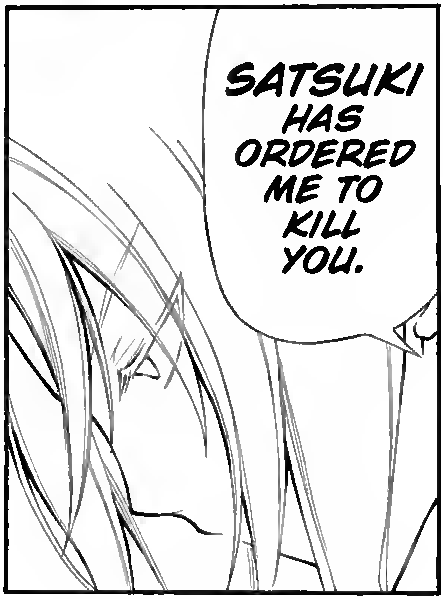
.....!
HEY!
PIG ...!
WHAT ABOUT NAO ...!?

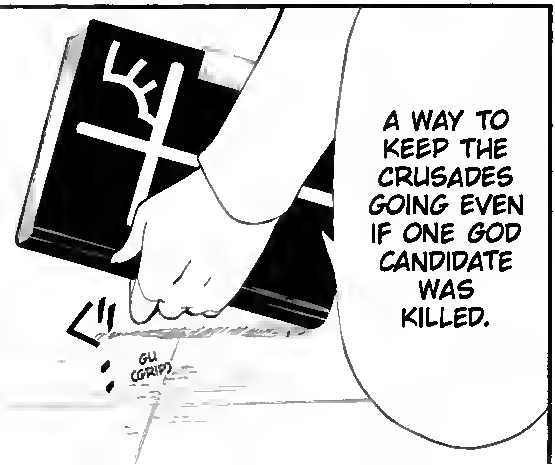

KATSU
CTAK
カ
ツ

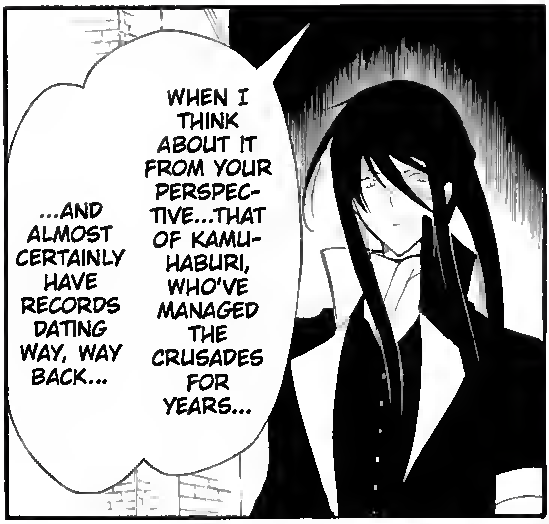
.....I'M AFRAID I CANNOT YIELD JUST YET.


IF NAO'S GONE...
.....I'M DONE WITH TONIGHT'S CRUSADE.
...I DON'T NEED TO GO AFTER THAT RELIC ANY-MORE.

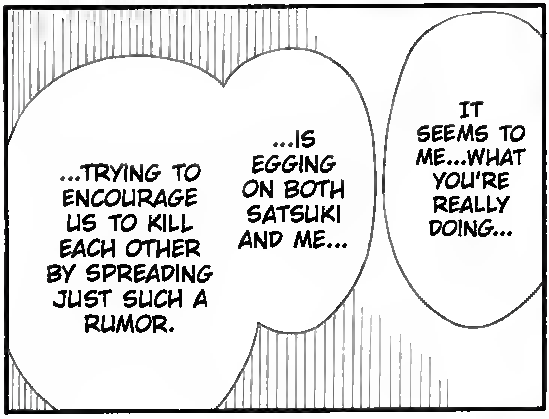
YOU MENTIONED SOMETHING EARLIER...
OH RIGHT ...

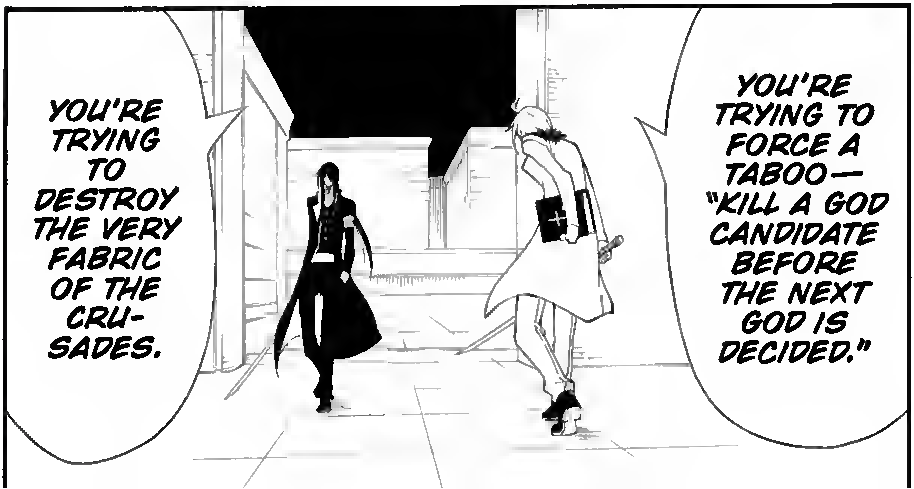

SATSUKI HAS ORDERED ME TO KILL YOU.


A WAY TO KEEP THE CRUSADES GOING EVEN IF ONE GOD CANDIDATE WAS KILLED.
GU (GRIP)


WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE...THAT OF KAMUHABURI, WHO'VE MANAGED THE CRUSADES FOR YEARS...
...AND ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE RECORDS DATING WAY, WAY BACK...

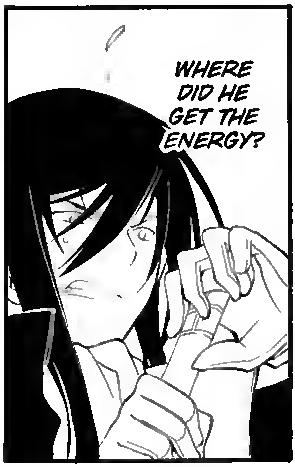
SO...
...IS IT FOR REAL?

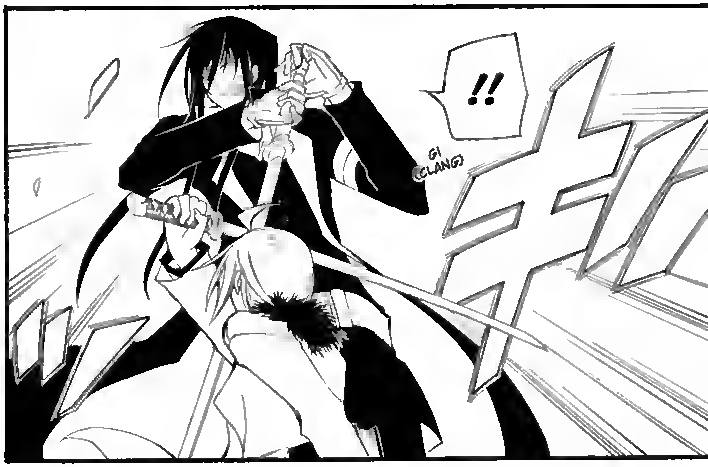

IT SEEMS TO ME...WHAT YOU'RE REALLY DOING...
...IS EGGING ON BOTH SATSUKI AND ME...
...TRYING TO ENCOURAGE US TO KILL EACH OTHER BY SPREADING JUST SUCH A RUMOR.


YOU'RE TRYING TO FORCE A TABOO—"KILL A GOD CANDIDATE BEFORE THE NEXT GOD IS DECIDED."
YOU'RE TRYING TO DESTROY THE VERY FABRIC OF THE CRUSADES.

DON (BOOM)
WHAT—
.....!
HMPH... DARN ARCA-NA.
THEY'RE MAKING THEIR MOVE TO TAKE DOWN KAMU-HABURI.
LOOKS LIKE THEY HAVE NO REASON TO HOLD BACK...
...NOW THAT THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT NAO'S LOYALTIES.
...NOW, THEN...

SU (FSH)
TON (TMP)


WHERE DID HE GET THE ENERGY?

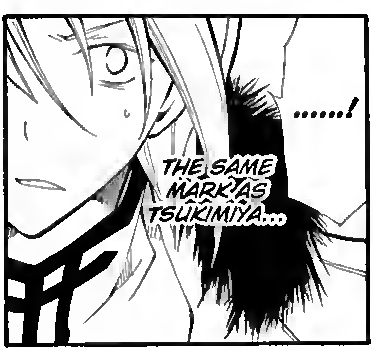

!!
GI (CLANG)

GA (SHOVE)
...THAT YOU KAMU-HABURI ARE SATSUKI'S MINIONS ...!

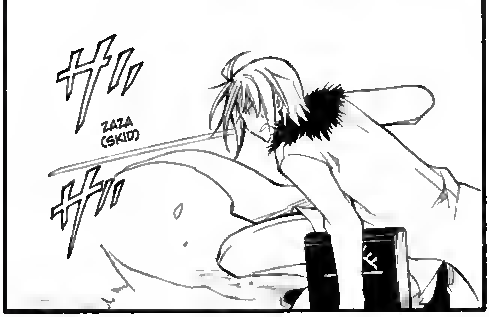
YEAH, DON'T MIND ME.
IT'S JUST, NOW I'VE RECON-FIRMED...
I THOUGHT YOU HAD GIVEN UP...
...LORD GOD CANDI-DATE.

JUST NEED TO VENT A LITTLE, IS ALL.
...HM?

A BLACK SEAL.....!?
WHA ...!?


.....!
THE SAME MARK AS TSUKIMIYA...

LORD GOD CANDI-DATE...
...IT APPEARS YOU STILL...
...DO NOT UNDER-STAND THIS BLACK MARK'S SIGNIFI-CANCE.
WHERE'D YOU GET THAT MARK...?
YOU...
GIN (KLANG)
UNH!!
SIGNIFI-CANCE ...?


ZAZA (SKID)

!
GA (WHLID)

I SEE...
I CONFESS IT IS A BIT VEXING...

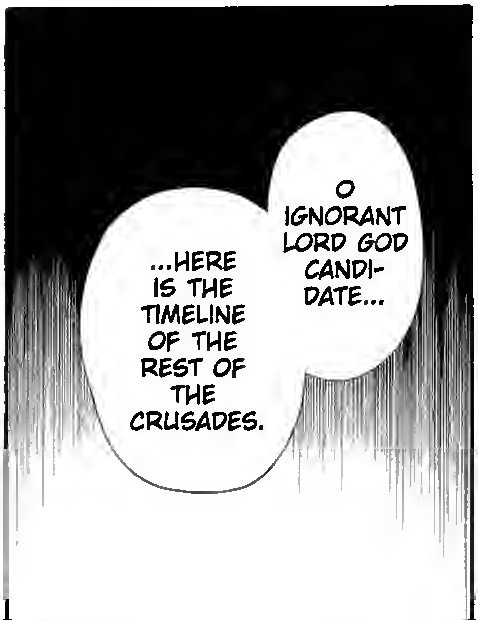
...THAT ONE WHO WOULD CUT DOWN A BLACK MARK BEARER...

...IS BLITHELY PARTICIPATING IN THE CRUSADES...
...WITHOUT ANY HESITATION OR MISGIVINGS.

TSU (SHI)
?
...WE'LL LEAVE IT AT THAT FOR TONIGHT.
.....
CUT DOWN... WHAT?
I COULDN'T CARRY OUT SATSUKI'S ORDER, BUT I HAVE THE RELIC.
IT SHOULD SUF-FICE.
...../
KATSU
KATSU (TAK)
WAIT!
I'M SEARCHING FOR CLUES THAT WILL HELP ME UNDO HER BLACK SEAL!
...FIRST THE HALF-BREED, NOW YOU WANT TO SAVE A BLACK MARK BEARER?
WHAT A MERCIFUL LORD GOD CANDIDATE.

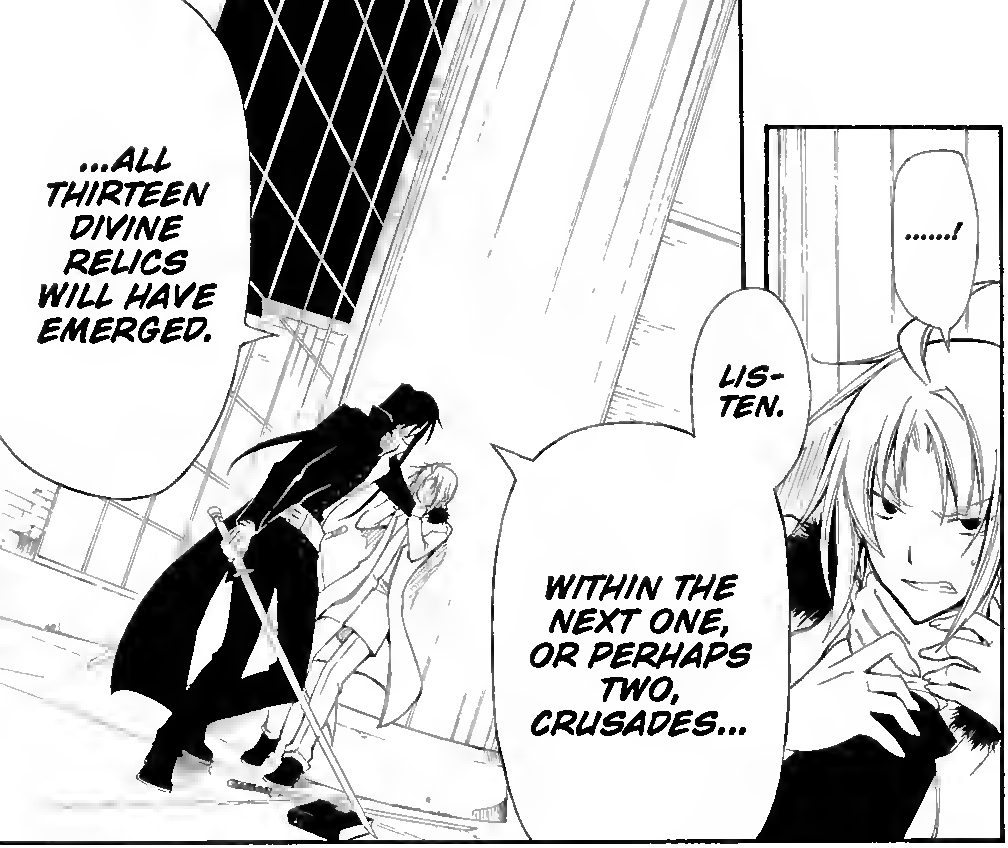
DAN
(WHAM)

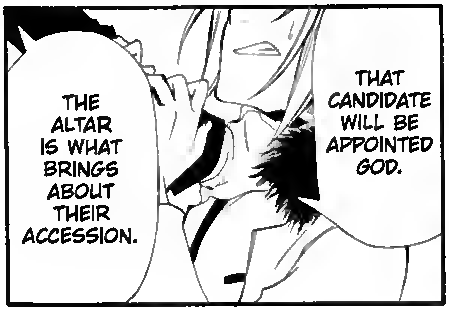
I SUPPOSE THE PROPHECY BOOKS DIDN'T CONTAIN MUCH DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THE BLACK MARK.
GUGU (STRAIN)
.....!

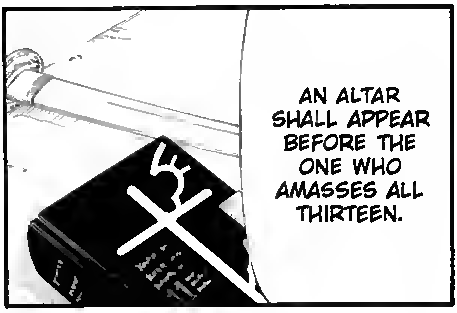

O IGNORANT LORD GOD CANDI-DATE...
...HERE IS THE TIMELINE OF THE REST OF THE CRUSADES.

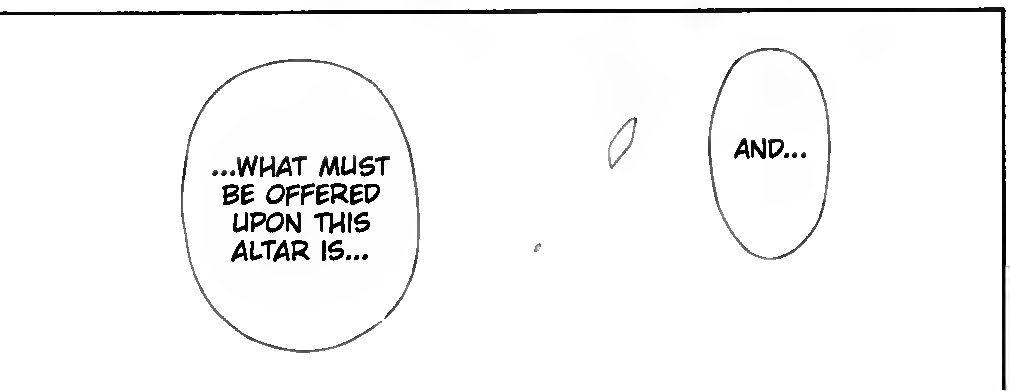
KASHAN (CLATTER)
GOTO (THD.)
...SO IT'S ALL RIGHT TO TELL YOU NOW...
I'M SURE YOU'LL SOON FIND OUT VIA AN ORACLE, BUT THE CRUSADES ARE REACHING THEIR END-GAME...

...I EXPECT.

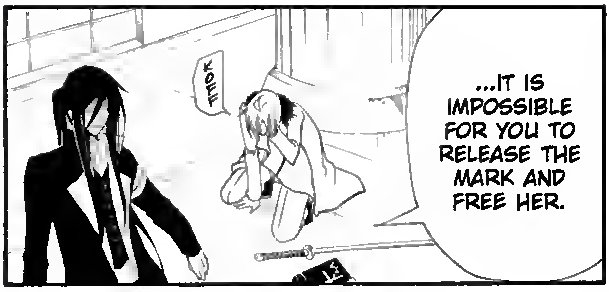

...ALL THIRTEEN DIVINE RELICS WILL HAVE EMERGED.
LIS-TEN.
WITHIN THE NEXT ONE, OR PERHAPS TWO, CRUSADES...
.....!


THE ALTAR IS WHAT BRINGS ABOUT THEIR ACCESSION.
THAT CANDIDATE WILL BE APPOINTED GOD.


AN ALTAR SHALL APPEAR BEFORE THE ONE WHO AMASSES ALL THIRTEEN.

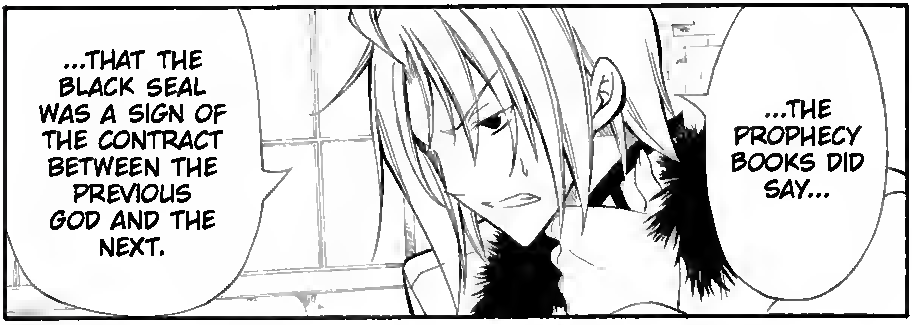

...WHAT MUST BE OFFERED UPON THIS ALTAR IS...
AND...

...THE BLOOD OF ONE WHO BEARS THE BLACK MARK.....
CONSECRATING AND THEN DRINKING IT COMPRISES ONE'S SUCCESSION TO THE SACRED SEAT.
WHA ...!?
THE BLACK MARK...
...IS THE MARK OF THE SACRIFICE IN THIS CRUSADE, THE KEY TO THE DOOR.


KOFU
...IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO RELEASE THE MARK AND FREE HER.

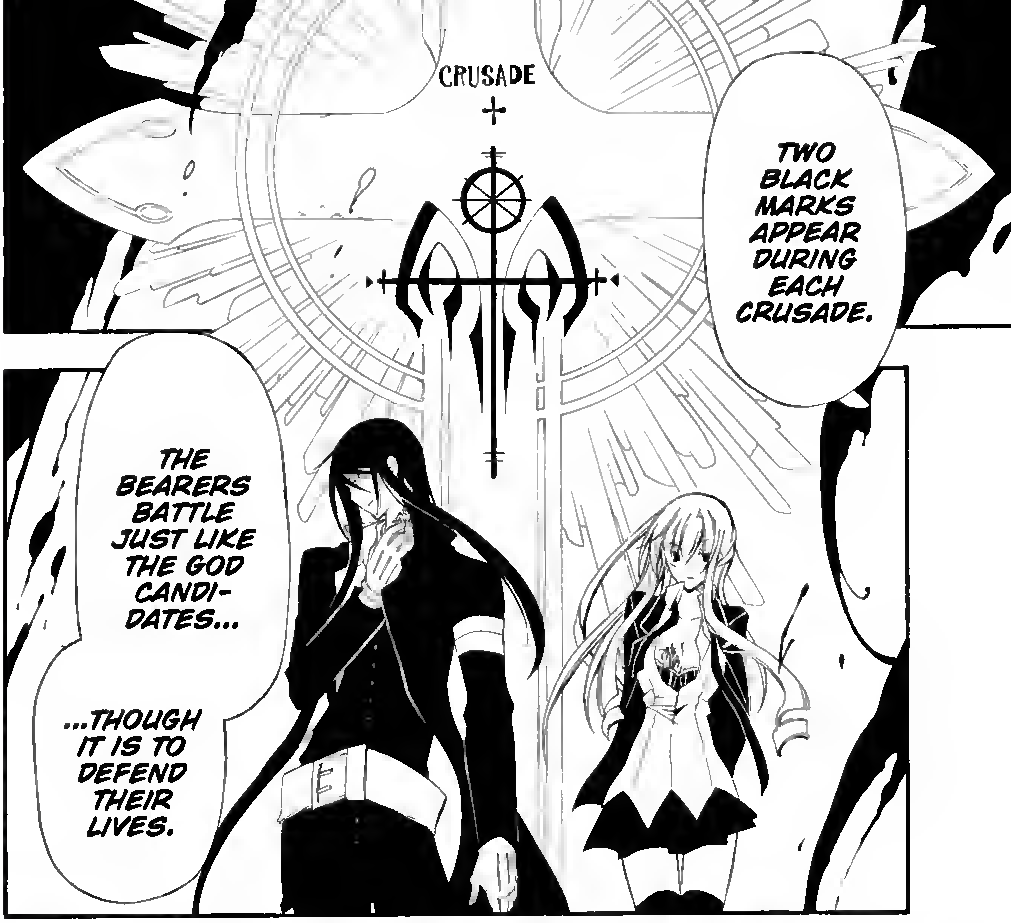
THUS...
SU (SHP)
AH...

...IF BOTH YOU AND SATSUKI FORFEIT, SHE MIGHT BE SPARED.
THOUGH, PERHAPS ...


...THAT THE BLACK SEAL WAS A SIGN OF THE CONTRACT BETWEEN THE PREVIOUS GOD AND THE NEXT.
...THE PROPHECY BOOKS DID SAY...

IT IS FACT.

ALL THE PAST GODS HAVE DONE THIS?
BUT... YOU'RE JOKING, RIGHT?

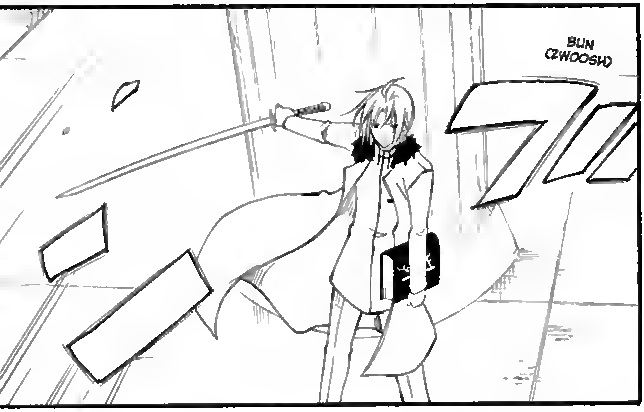

CRUSADE
TWO BLACK MARKS APPEAR DURING EACH CRUSADE.
THE BEARERS BATTLE JUST LIKE THE GOD CANDI-DATES...
...THOUGH IT IS TO DEFEND THEIR LIVES.

...IS TO OFFER HER TO THE WINNING GOD CANDIDATE IN YOUR STEAD?
...THEN...
...THE REASON YOU'VE TAKEN HER...
I MADE THIS DECISION AS KAMU-HABURI, NOT A MARK BEARER.
...WELL, I CANNOT COMPLETELY DENY THE CHARGE, BUT DON'T MISUNDER-STAND.

WHEN I FIRST MET TSUKIMIYA...
...I INTENDED TO LEAVE HER BE, TO TREAT HER MERELY AS THE ASSOCIATE OF A GOD CANDIDATE.
BUT LATER... WHEN I LEARNED YOU'D ALLIED WITH ARCANA, I HAD TO DO SOMETHING.

.....I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR EXCUSES ...
...KAMUHABURI.

YOU DO REALIZE...
...THAT ARCANA INTENDS TO STEAL THE GODHOOD FROM YOU BOTH?

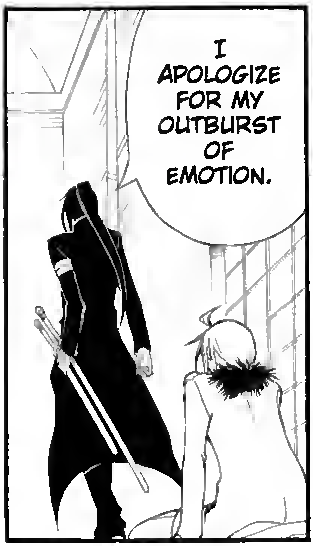

BUN CZWOOSHD

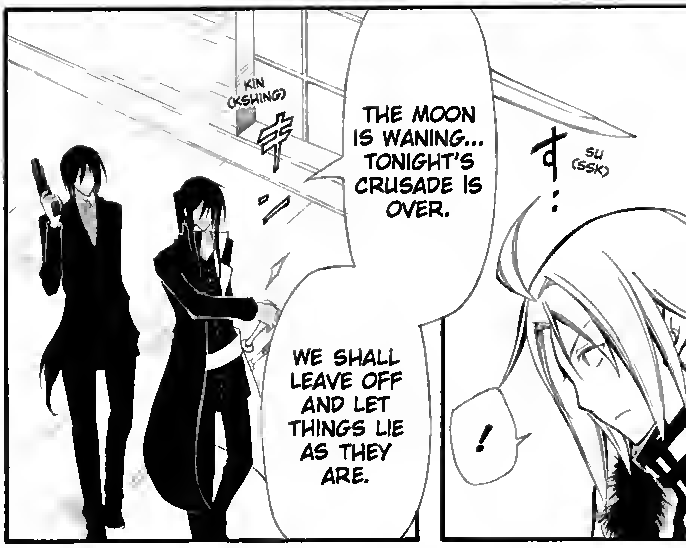
...ALL I HEAR IS THAT YOU'VE BRAINWASHED MY PLAYER B... TO ME...
...ROBBED HER OF HER FREEDOM, AND WILL EVENTUALLY KILL HER AS A SACRIFICE.

WE'RE ONLY SHELTERING HER IN ORDER TO DENY ARCANA BOTH BLACK MARKS.
...NO!
PISHI (KRIK)
GA (GSH)
PACHIN (SNAP)
YOU CAN'T FIGHT WITH A BROKEN BLADE.
!!

WOULD YOU RATHER BE KILLED OR TAKEN HOSTAGE...
...LORD GOD CANDI-DATE?
KACHA CHA-CLICK
KAMUHABURI UNITS HAVE TAKEN HEAVY DAMAGE FROM ARCANA.
SHOULD YOU NOT RE-TREAT?
.....

.....


I APOLOGIZE FOR MY OUTBURST OF EMOTION.

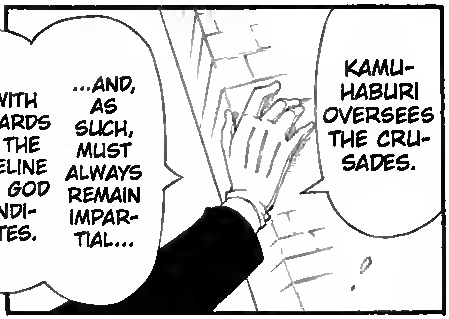

KIN (KSHING)
THE MOON IS WANING... TONIGHT'S CRUSADE IS OVER.
WE SHALL LEAVE OFF AND LET THINGS LIE AS THEY ARE.
SU (SSK)
!

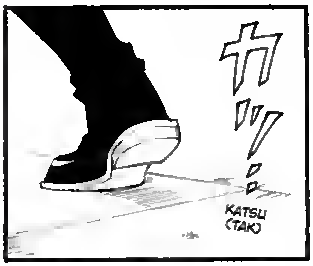
I THOUGHT I'D ACCEPTED BEING A BLACK MARK, BUT...

NO ONE WOULD WANT TO DIE FOR SUCH A REASON.
IT'S ONLY NATU-RAL...

...LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
I PLAN TO TELL SATSUKI ABOUT THE BLACK MARK WHEN I GET BACK...
...SO DON'T THINK YOU HAVE THE UPPER HAND.

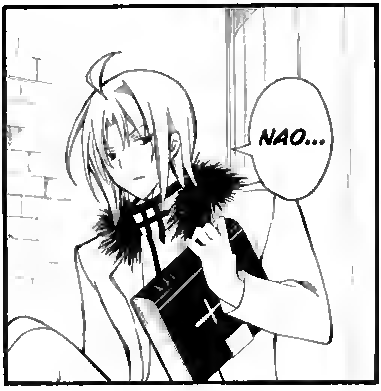
...DIVULGE YOU'RE ONE OF THE SACRIFICES...
...TO SOMEONE WHO'D KILL YOU WITHOUT HESITATION?


KAMU-HABURI OVERSEES THE CRUSADES.
...AND, AS SUCH, MUST ALWAYS REMAIN IMPARTIAL...
...WITH REGARDS TO THE TIMELINE AND GOD CANDIDATES.


KATSU (TAK)

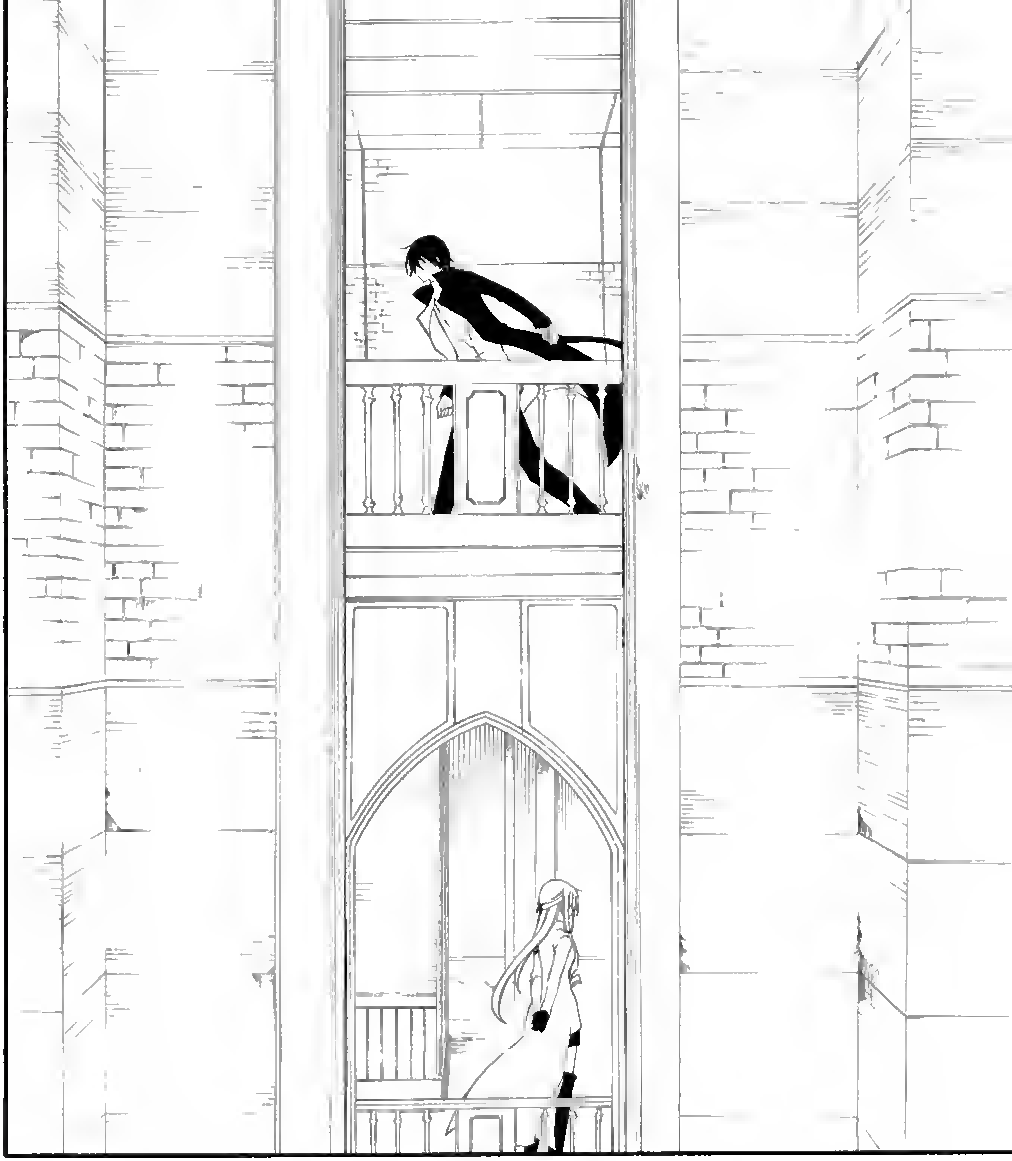
I AM KAMU-HABURI FIRST AND MARK BEARER SECOND.

...YOU DID GOOD.


NAO...

I WISH I COULD'VE SAVED YOU.

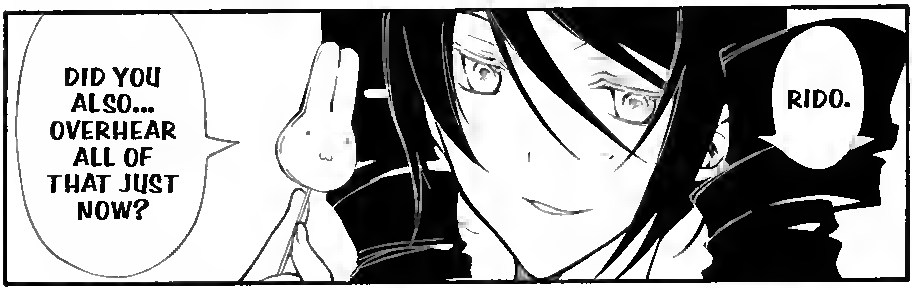
RIIING...
PI (BEEP)
HANA-MURA? ...YEAH, I HEARD.
I WAS USING A SPELL TO EAVES-DROP.
SECURE TSUKIMIYA STAT, RIGHT?
I'LL GO FIND HER NOW.
IF THAT MARK IS THE CRUSADES'...
...ALL THE MORE REASON NOT TO LEAVE HER IN ENEMY HANDS!
DAMMIT...! I SENSE HER NEARBY, BUT...
...WHERE IS SHE!?
TSUKI-MIYA ...!
WHERE ARE YOU!?
HEY!
TA (DASH)



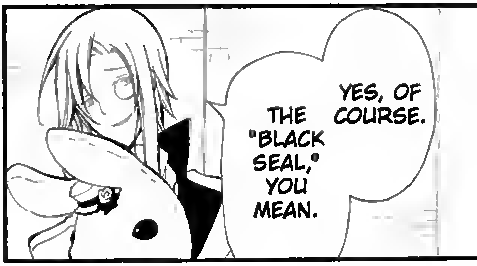
KOTSU (TOK)
コツ
KOTSU
コツ

KOTSU
I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, LADY TSUKIMIYA.
...I WAS SUM-MONED... TO MEET SOMEONE HERE...
YES, I HAD ORIGINALLY, BUT...
I THOUGHT YOU'D STAYED BACK AT HEAD-QUAR-TERS.
RIDO.
KATSU
KATSU
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING!
KATSU (TAK)
?

カロン
KATSU (TAK)


DID YOU ALSO... OVERHEAR ALL OF THAT JUST NOW?
RIDO.

SUDDENLY, I'VE... GOTTEN EXCITED AGAIN.
TO (HOP)
HEE! ♡


YES, OF COURSE.
THE "BLACK SEAL," YOU MEAN.

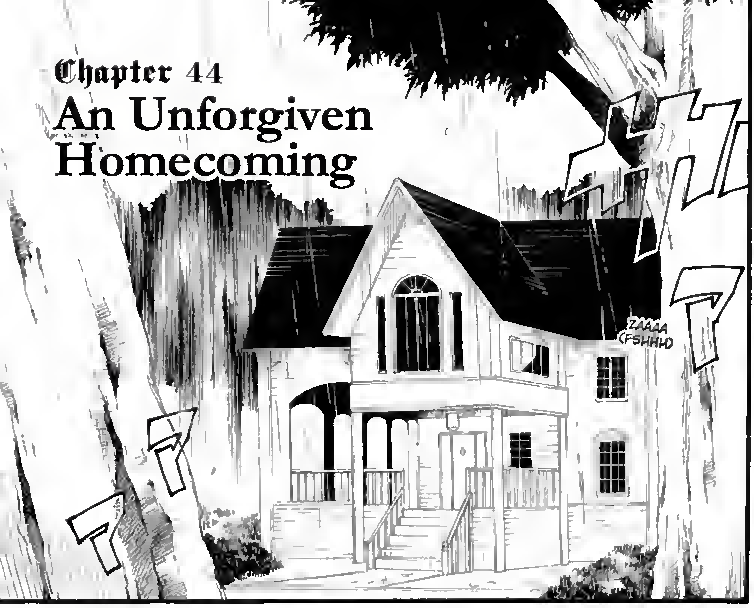
I THINK...
...I WANT TO PLAY WITH THIS ONE NEXT! ♡
KAPU (NIBBLE)
...NH.
THE BEARER OF A BLACK SEAL...
PRIME MATERIAL FOR STIMULATING DEVELOP-MENTS, I DARESAY.
HO-HO, THAT'S ENOUGH FUN FOR NOW.
ZAA (SWOO)
PACHIN (SNAP)
...SHALL WE...
...BE ON OUR WAY, LADY KANADE?
SHUN (WHOOSH)

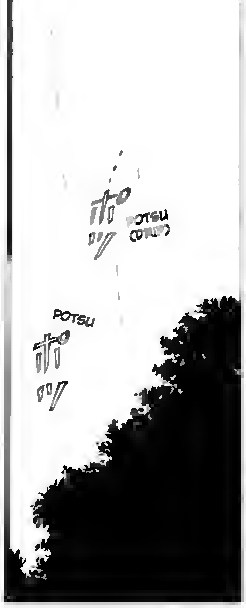
ZA (SKSH)
EVE-NING.
I FELT IT WAS HIGH TIME...
...WE PAID YOU A VISIT. ♡

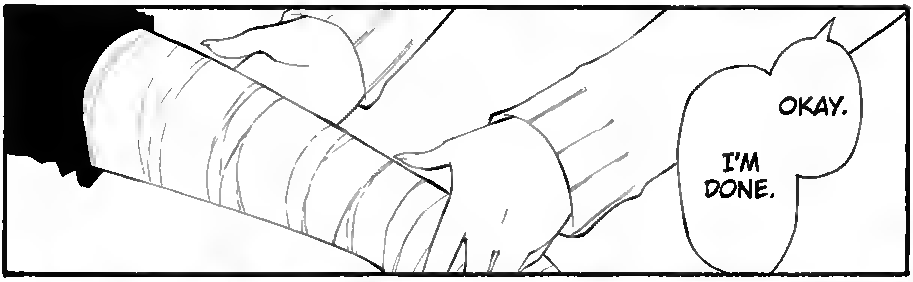
BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

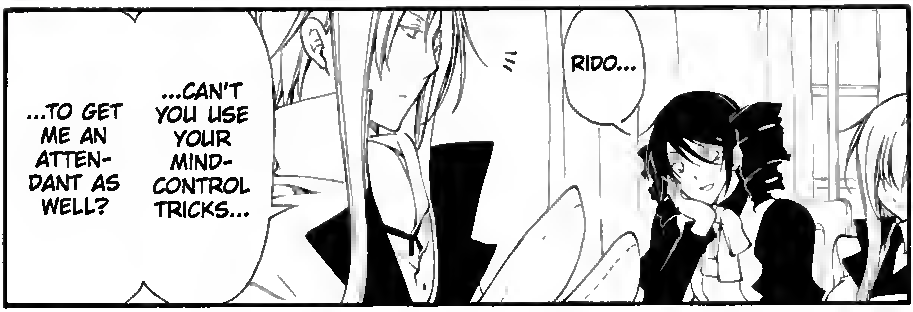
Chapter 44
An Unforgiven Homecoming

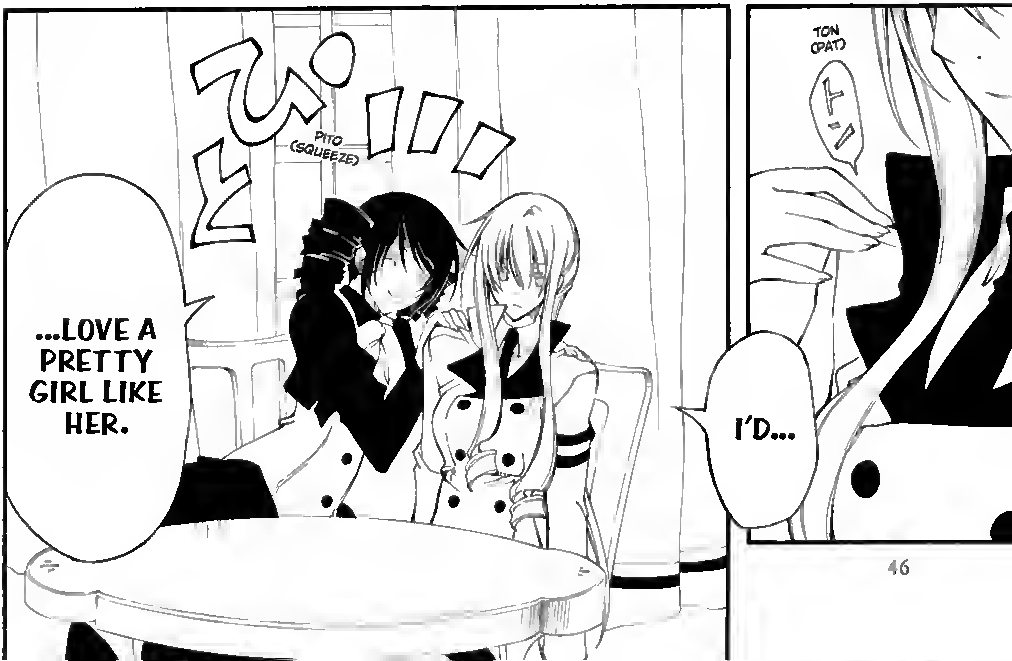






WHAT A BRAVE LITTLE KITTY.
HOW NICE.
I WANT ONE OF THOSE TOO!


RIDO...
...CAN'T YOU USE YOUR MIND-CONTROL TRICKS...
...TO GET ME AN ATTEN-DANT AS WELL?

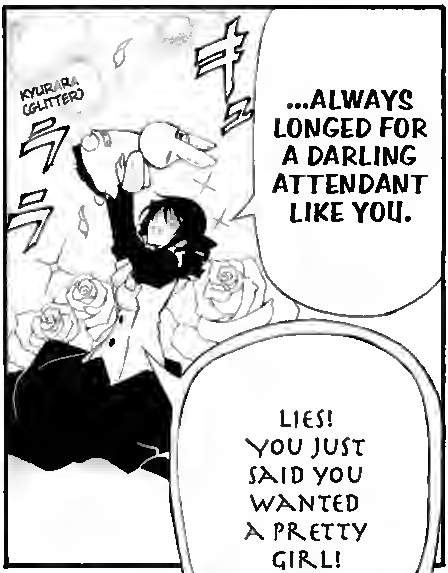

TON (PAT)
I'D...
PITO (SQUEEZE)
...LOVE A PRETTY GIRL LIKE HER.

I FEAR YOU'D DISCARD HER ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, LADY KANADE.
SO I MUST OBJECT.
AW...

MISS MARIANNE.
ACTUALLY, I'VE...

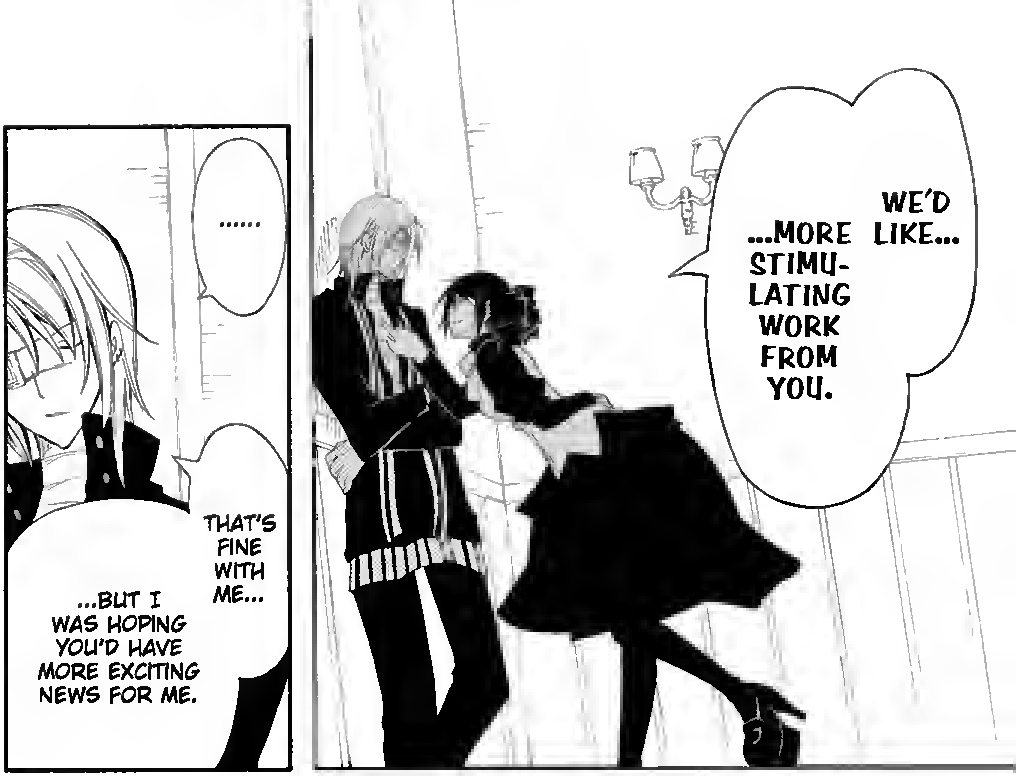
THEN WHAT ABOUT THE DISPENSABLE MISS MARIANNE?
"DISPENSABLE"!? HOW DARE YOU!?
WENCH!!
KII (SCREECH)

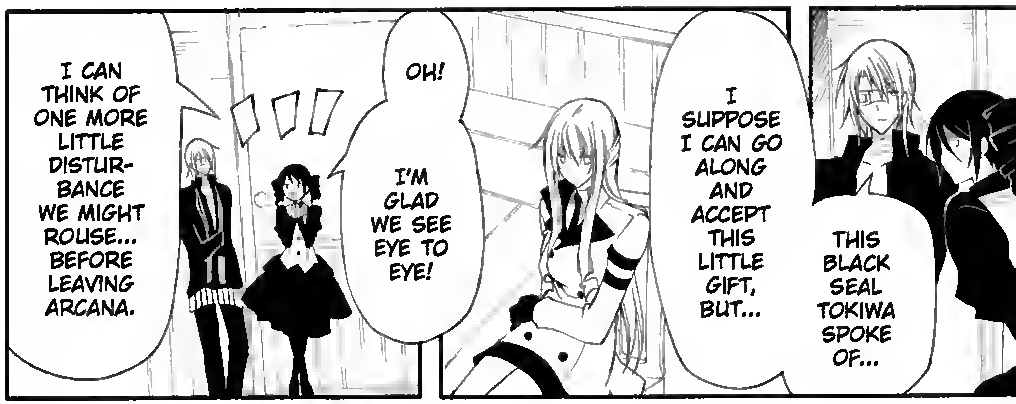
DAMMIT! YOU'RE BOTH USELESS ...!
WHAT A PAIN IN THE... AHEM. THE RAIN'S PICKED UP.
RIDO! HELP ME, RIDO!
GATA (CLACK)


...ALWAYS LONGED FOR A DARLING ATTENDANT LIKE YOU.
KYURURU (GLITTER)
LIES! YOU JUST SAID YOU WANTED A PRETTY GIRL!

QUIET.
OH MY... PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
JUST PASSING THE TIME.
SO WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I THOUGHT I'D ORDERED YOU TO LEAK INTEL TO ME...
...FROM KAMUHA-BURI AND ARCANA, RESPEC-TIVELY.
RIGHT, RIGHT.
ABOUT THIS SPYING BUSI-NESS...
I WAS HOPING WE MIGHT CONCLUDE OUR MISSIONS SOON.
I CAME TO ASK YOUR AP-PROVAL.
..."CON-CLUDE"?

OH, PLEASE DON'T MIS-UNDER-STAND.
I INTEND TO REMAIN IN YOUR SERVICE.
YOU OF ALL OTHERS LET ME CHOOSE MY OWN METHODS...
...AND ALLOW ME TO DO AS I PLEASE.
RIGHT?
DON'T YOU AGREE, RIDO?
YES.
LIFE HAS BEEN MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE SINCE SWITCHING ALLEGIANCES.
...I SEE.
...BUT SINCE NEITHER KAMUHABURI NOR ARCANA ARE LIKELY TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL INCIDENTS FROM HERE ON OUT...
...PERHAPS YOU CAN OBTAIN INTEL THROUGH OTHER MEANS NOW?
KOTSU (TOK)
WE BOTH ARE STARTING TO TIRE...
TON (PRESS)
...OF BEING MEEK AND DOCILE.


WE'D LIKE...
...MORE STIMULATING WORK FROM YOU.
.....
THAT'S FINE WITH ME...
...BUT I WAS HOPING YOU'D HAVE MORE EXCITING NEWS FOR ME.

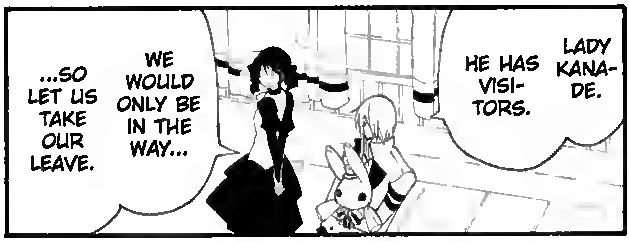

I SUPPOSE I CAN GO ALONG AND ACCEPT THIS LITTLE GIFT, BUT...
THIS BLACK SEAL TOKIWA SPOKE OF...
OH!
I'M GLAD WE SEE EYE TO EYE!
I CAN THINK OF ONE MORE LITTLE DISTURBANCE WE MIGHT ROUSE... BEFORE LEAVING ARCANA.

HEE HEE...
BETRAYALS OF THIS SCALE CALL FOR A GRAND SPECTACLE...
KOTSU
CTOK
I MUST SUPPLY PLENTY OF STIMULATION!

SU (BOW)
I HAVE... A DELIGHTFUL PLAN.
PLEASE LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME.

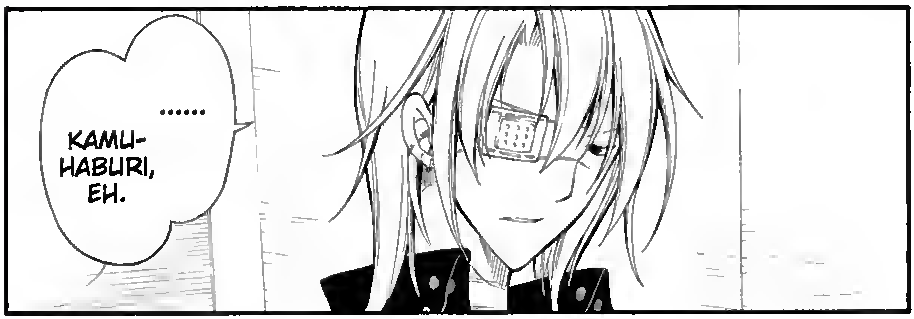
AWW.
WE CAN'T EVEN STRATEGIZE IN PEACE, CAN WE?
ZAAA (SWOOSH)

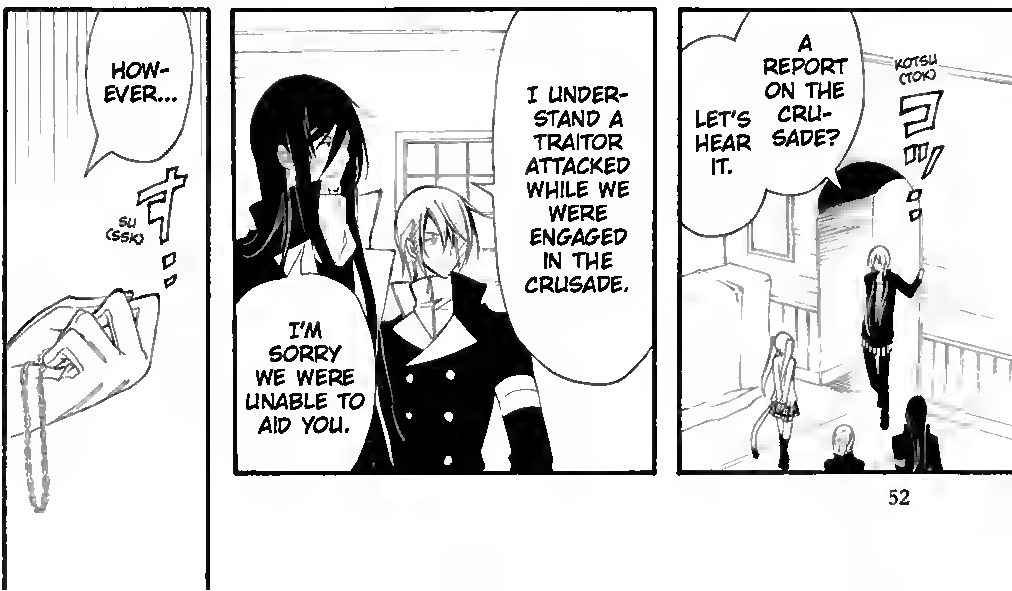
RIN (RING)
RIN
YES, COMING!
.....


LADY KANADE.
HE HAS VISITORS.
WE WOULD ONLY BE IN THE WAY...
...SO LET US TAKE OUR LEAVE.

AAAA (FSHHH)
WELL, SATSUKI...
...WE'LL RETURN TO YOU BEFORE TOO LONG.
DO LOOK FORWARD TO IT.

SA-TSUKI!
VISI-TORS.
EXCUSE US.


.....
KAMU-HABURI, EH.


A REPORT ON THE CRU-SADE?
KOTSU (TOK)
LET'S HEAR IT.
I UNDER-STAND A TRAITOR ATTACKED WHILE WE WERE ENGAGED IN THE CRUSADE.
I'M SORRY WE WERE UNABLE TO AID YOU.
HOW-EVER...
SU (SSK)

...I BROUGHT YOU THE DIVINE RELIC AS PROM-ISED.
KOO (FWOO)
HERE IT IS, LORD GOD CANDI-DATE.
.....
...WHAT, YOU JUST BROUGHT THE RELIC?
HUH?
TELL ME...
...DID I NOT ORDER YOU TO KILL THE OTHER GOD CANDIDATE TOO...
... KAMU-HABU-RI?
KIKU-SAKA.
LEAVE THE ROOM.
...GH!
...TO-KIWA-SAN!
FOR ALL YOUR BIG TALK... YOU'VE NOT MUCH TO SHOW FOR IT.
THE FIRST TIME IT WAS JUST A LACKEY, BUT NOW EVEN THE HEAD OF KAMUHABURI FAILS?

.....
I HAVE SOMETHING TO DISCUSS WITH THE LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
PATAN (SHUT)
NOW, THEN...
SHURU (SHLD)
I TOLD TSUZUKI WHEN I FACED OFF AGAINST HIM...
...SO I WILL SHARE IT WITH YOU ALSO.
THIS... BLACK MARK...
...IS A SIGN THAT ONE HAS BEEN CHOSEN AS A CRUSADE SACRI-FICE.

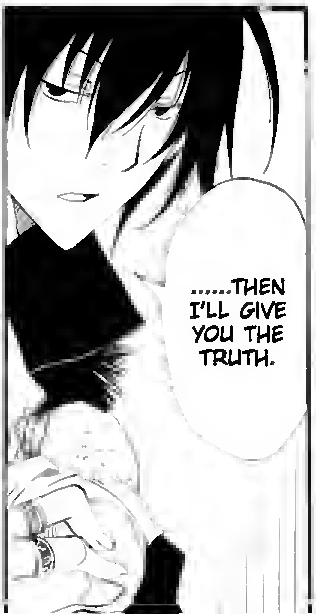
PATAN
HOW DID IT GO, KIKUSAKA-SAN?
.....
SAAAAA (FSHHHD
HAAH...
TON (TMP)
TON
TOKIWA-SAN... APPARENTLY DOESN'T INTEND TO RELAY TSUZUKI'S QUESTION, WHETHER THERE REALLY IS A WAY TO KEEP THE CRUSADES GOING EVEN IF ONE GOD CANDIDATE IS KILLED...
...NOR DOES HE INTEND TO PROVIDE THE ANSWER.
.....
'COURSE. HE CAN'T INSULT THE GOD CANDIDATE WE'RE ALLIED WITH.
HOW LONG ...
...IS THIS ALLIANCE GOING TO LAST...?
SAAAAA
BUT...
...OUR MEMBERS ARE GETTING TIRED OF SATSUKI'S ATTITUDE.

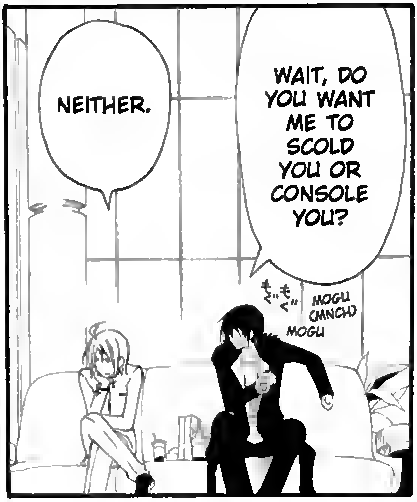
ARCANA
GASA (RUSTLE)
HERE.
EAT.
Burger
...NO THANKS. I'M NOT HUNGRY.

WHERE'S HANA-MURA?
...HE'S TAKING... THE BOOK OF DA'AT TO THE DEPOSITORY ...
THE RELIC NAO SWIPED FROM SATSUKI...
GOT-CHA.
IZUMI SAID HE'LL BE FREE IN A LITTLE WHILE.
APPAR-ENTLY HE'S PRETTY BUSY WITH THE CLEANUP OR SOME-THING.
TOUGH TO LEAD A LARGE GROUP.
GASA GASA
IF ARCANA ...
IF ARCANA HAD PROVIDED SUPPORT AS WE ALL AGREED AT THE OUTSET...
...WE'D HAVE WON.
ARCANA HAD ITS REASONS NOT TO.
MAKE A MOVE WITH A TRAITOR IN YOUR MIDST...
...AND THEY AS AN ORGANIZATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ROUTED THAN OUR TEAM OF INDIVIDUALS.
... THEN ...

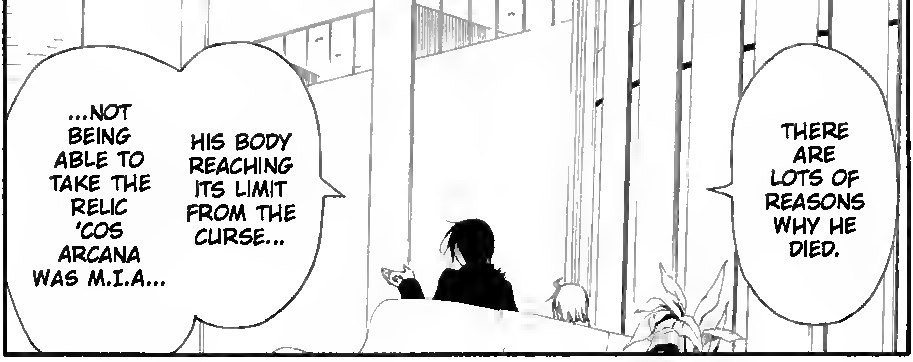
...NAO'S DEATH IS ON ME...
...FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO DEFEAT SATSUKI...

...AND NOT HAVING ENOUGH DIVINE POWER AT MY DIS-POSAL.

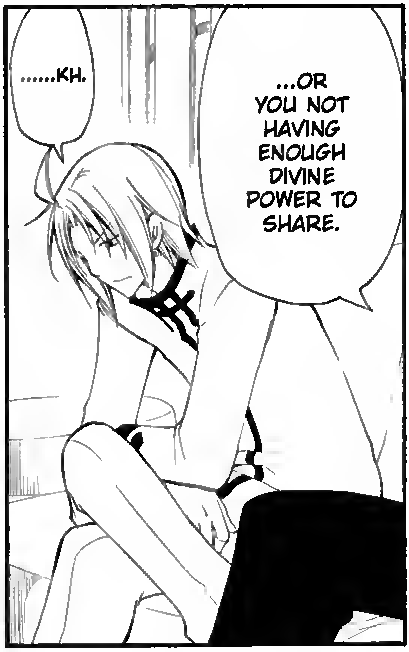

.....THEN I'LL GIVE YOU THE TRUTH.

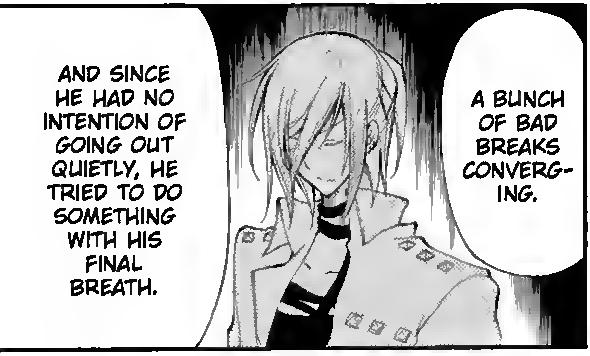

NEITHER.
WAIT, DO YOU WANT ME TO SCOLD YOU OR CONSOLE YOU?
MOGU CHUCHU MOGU

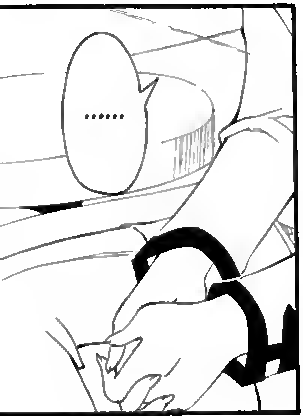
.....


THERE ARE LOTS OF REASONS WHY HE DIED.
HIS BODY REACHING ITS LIMIT FROM THE CURSE...
...NOT BEING ABLE TO TAKE THE RELIC 'COS ARCANA WAS M.I.A...

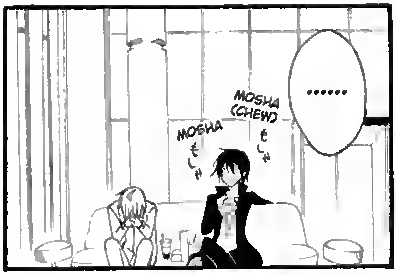
AND YOU KNOW, TO SOME DEGREE, THAT LAST PART'S 'COS TSUKIMIYA AND I HAD ALREADY TAKEN SOME OF YOUR DIVINE POWER.
OH... AND MOST OF ALL, HE WAS FACING SATSUKI, OF ALL PEOPLE.


...OR YOU NOT HAVING ENOUGH DIVINE POWER TO SHARE.
.....KH.


A BUNCH OF BAD BREAKS CONVERG-ING.
AND SINCE HE HAD NO INTENTION OF GOING OUT QUIETLY, HE TRIED TO DO SOMETHING WITH HIS FINAL BREATH.

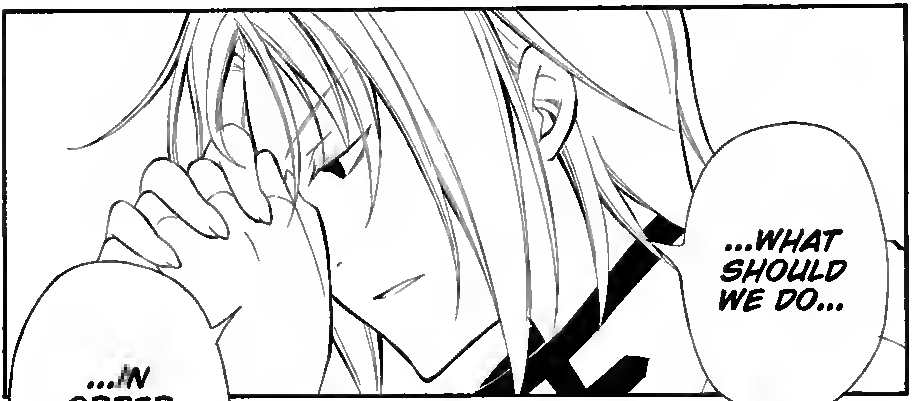

.....

I DON'T THINK IT WAS ANY ONE PERSON'S FAULT.


.....
MOSHA (CHEW)
MOSHA

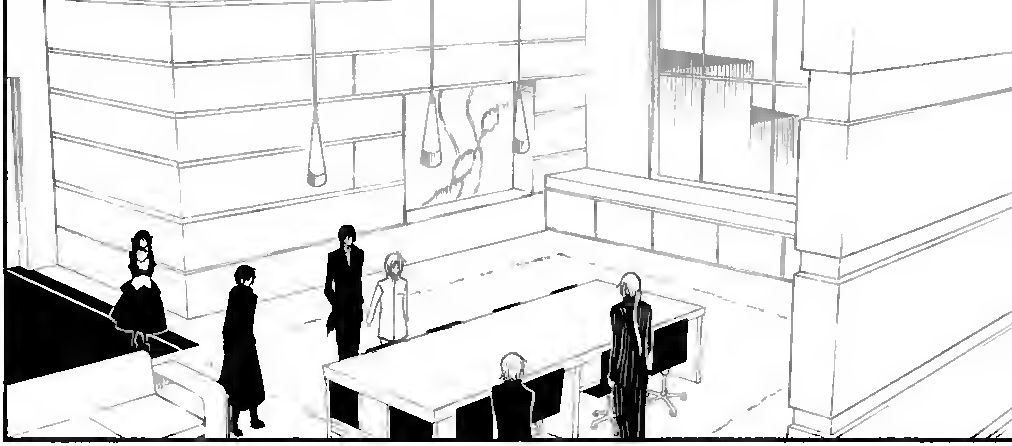
.....HEY.
...THEN...

WELL, IF YOU GOT OVER IT RIGHT AWAY, NAO WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO REST IN PEACE, SO NO WORRIES.
MM... I STILL CAN'T ACCEPT IT.


...WHAT SHOULD WE DO...

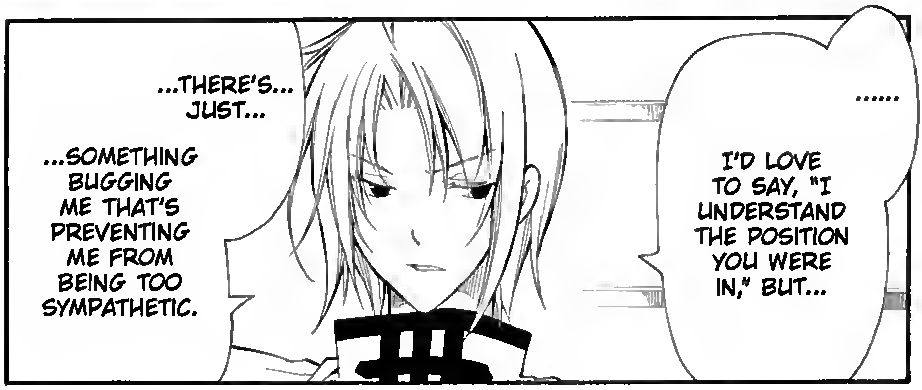
...IN ORDER TO REPAY NAO'S ACTIONS?

KOTSU (TOK)
KOTSU
AS YOU CAN SEE, WE'RE STILL WAITING.
IZUMI HASN'T COME DOWN YET?
WHY ARE YOU OUT HERE?
...HUH?
THE BOOK OF DA'AT IS UNDER HEAVY LOCK AND KEY.
LET'S DECODE IT ONCE WE HAVE THE TIME.
YEAH, THANKS.
YEESH...
WHAT TERRIBLE RAIN!
I SHOULD'VE DRIVEN OR TAKEN A CAB.
AH, THERE YOU ARE!
SORRY FOR THE WAIT.
HIS EXCELLENCY IS FINALLY FREE.
LET'S GO UPSTAIRS TO TALK.



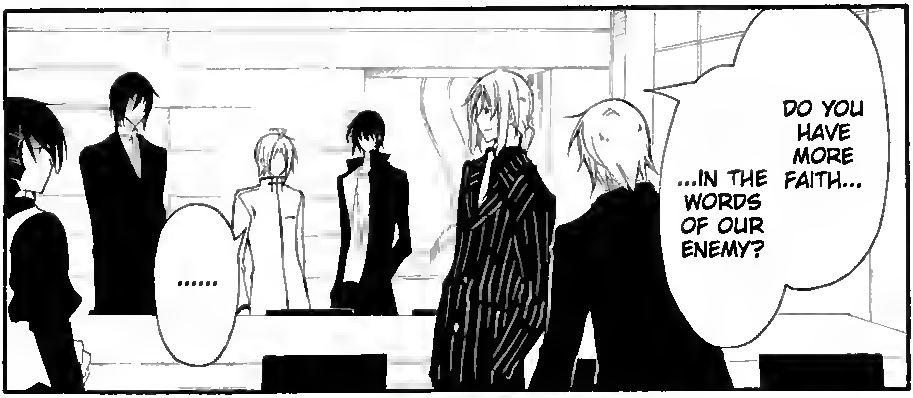
TSU-
ZUKI?
.....

SORRY TO HAVE KEPT YOU WAITING.
FIRST, I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE FOR ARCANA'S DELAYED STRIKE DURING THIS LAST CRUSADE.

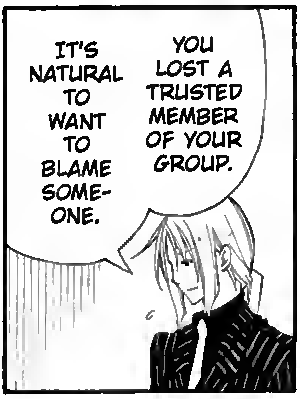

.....
I'D LOVE TO SAY, "I UNDERSTAND THE POSITION YOU WERE IN," BUT...
...THERE'S... JUST...
...SOMETHING BUGGING ME THAT'S PREVENTING ME FROM BEING TOO SYMPATHETIC.

SO...
...ARE YOU CONSID-ERING...
...MAKING A PLAY TO TRY TO BECOME GOD YOUR-SELF?
CAN I ASK YOU SOME-THING?
WHAT IS IT?
.....
WHA ...!?
.....
...../
.....I DID WONDER...
I WAS TOLD...YOU'D HAD A CON-VERSATION WITH KAMU-HABURI'S TOKIWA.
THAT'D BETTER NOT BE THE REASON YOU WERE LATE...OR SO I'M HOPING.
KAMUHABURI TOLD ME THAT ARCANA INTENDS TO STEAL THE GODHOOD.

I THOUGHT I EXPLAINED THAT WHEN WE FORMED OUR PACT.
...HAS BEEN TO USE YOUR RELIC-SENSING ABILITY TO OBTAIN MORE OF THEM...
MY MOTIVE FROM THE START...

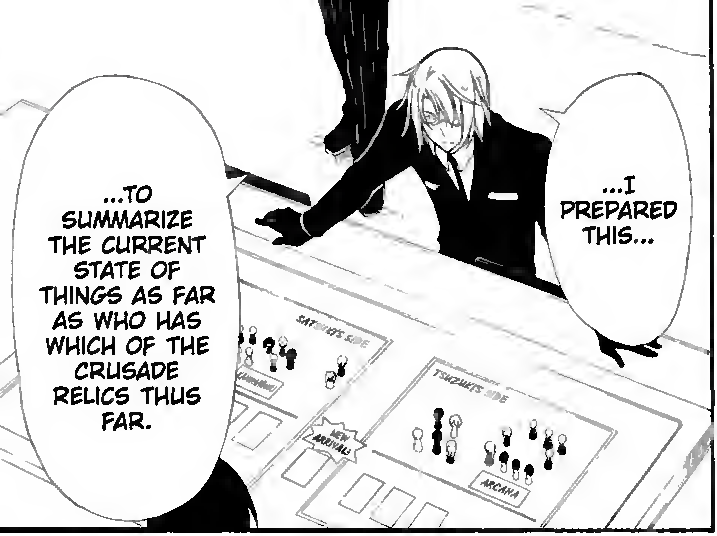

.....
...IN THE WORDS OF OUR ENEMY?
DO YOU HAVE MORE FAITH...

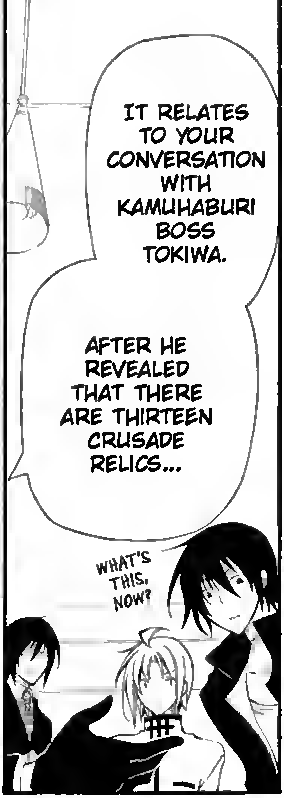
COULD WE GET ON WITH THE MEET-ING?
...UM, FORGIVE ME, BUT WE HAVEN'T MUCH TIME.
GO AHEAD.


IT'S NATURAL TO WANT TO BLAME SOME-ONE.
YOU LOST A TRUSTED MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP.

I'M SORRY I EVEN ASKED.
...NO, IF IT'S NOT TRUE, THEN WE'RE GOOD.

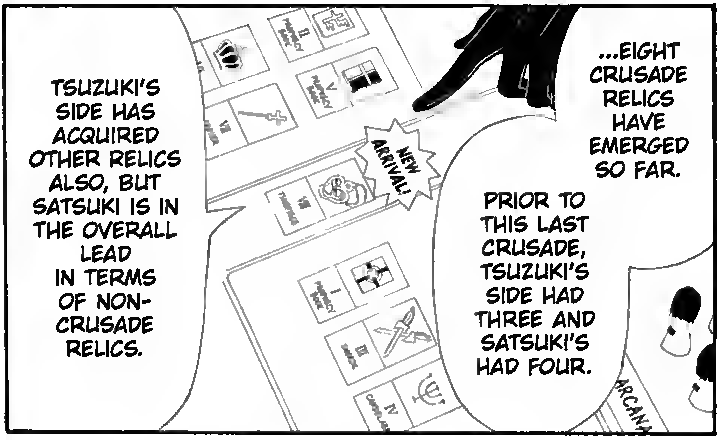
...HERE IT IS!
GATA
GKLAKO
... THEN ...

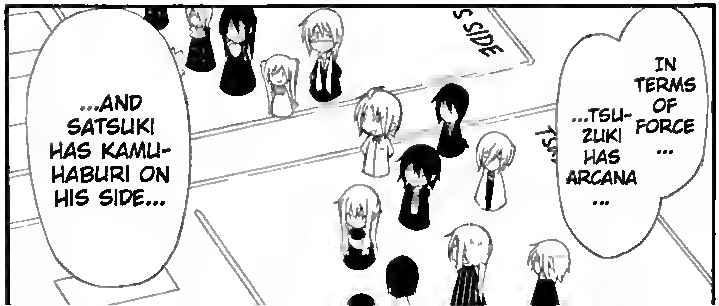

...I PREPARED THIS...
...TO SUMMARIZE THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS AS FAR AS WHO HAS WHICH OF THE CRUSADE RELICS THUS FAR.
NEW ARRIVAL
ARCANA


IT RELATES TO YOUR CONVERSATION WITH KAMUHABURI BOSS TOKIWA.
AFTER HE REVEALED THAT THERE ARE THIRTEEN CRUSADE RELICS...
WHAT'S THIS, NOW?

FOR-GIVE ME, SIR!
MA-KINO-KUN.
HEY, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT!?
WHOA... MAKINO'S BEEN WORK-ING!
ER, SO ACCORD-ING TO THIS...

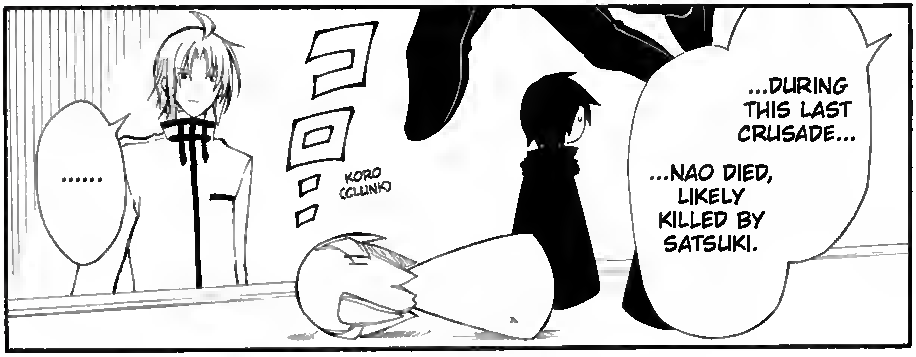
NOW...
...RECENT CHANGES IN THE RANKS INCLUDE...
KACHA CHAK
カチャ

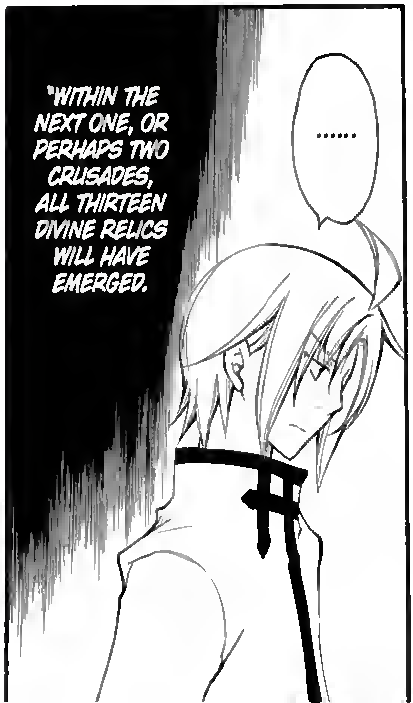

...EIGHT CRUSADE RELICS HAVE EMERGED SO FAR.
PRIOR TO THIS LAST CRUSADE, TSUZUKI'S SIDE HAD THREE AND SATSUKI'S HAD FOUR.
TSUZUKI'S SIDE HAS ACQUIRED OTHER RELICS ALSO, BUT SATSUKI IS IN THE OVERALL LEAD IN TERMS OF NON-CRUSADE RELICS.
NEW ARRIVAL
ARCANA

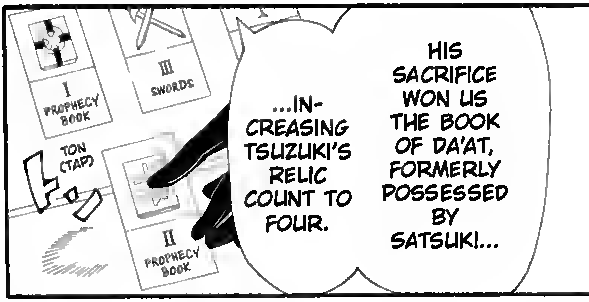

...AND SATSUKI HAS KAMU-HABURI ON HIS SIDE...
...TSU-ZUKI HAS ARCANA ...
IN TERMS OF FORCE ...

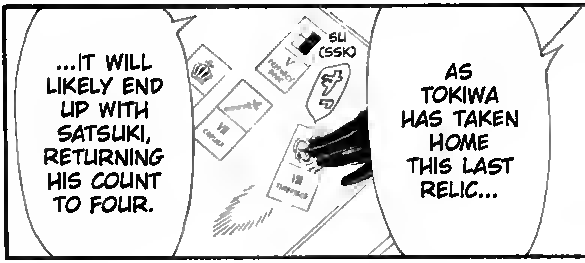
AND...

WOW, YOU MADE ALL THESE?
WE COMMISSIONED THEM.
...LURED UNIT SIX CAPTAIN KANADE AWAY FROM KAMUHABURI.
ON THE OTHER SIDE, ARCANA...
...TSUKIMIYA, WHO WAS WITH TSUZUKI UNTIL SHE WAS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING THE BLACK MARK...
...AFTER WHICH SHE WAS KIDNAPPED, BRAINWASHED, AND MADE A KAMUHABURI OFFICER.
KOTO (TINK)

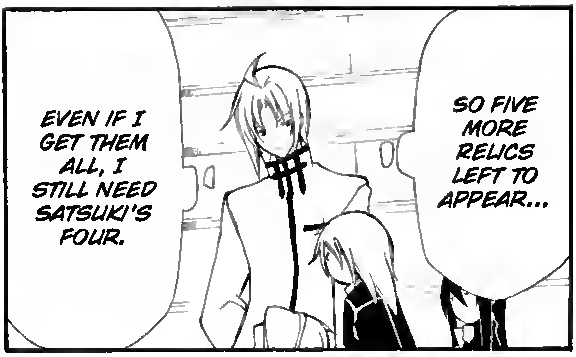

.....
KORO (CLUNK)
...DURING THIS LAST CRUSADE...
...NAO DIED, LIKELY KILLED BY SATSUKI.


"WITHIN THE NEXT ONE, OR PERHAPS TWO CRUSADES, ALL THIRTEEN DIVINE RELICS WILL HAVE EMERGED.
.....

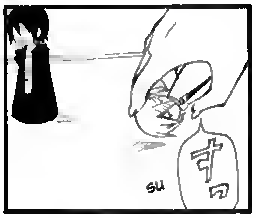

I PROPHECY BOOK
III SWORDS
TON (TAP)
II PROPHECY BOOK
...INCREASING TSUZUKI'S RELIC COUNT TO FOUR.
HIS SACRIFICE WON US THE BOOK OF DA'AT, FORMERLY POSSESSED BY SATSUKI...


...IT WILL LIKELY END UP WITH SATSUKI, RETURNING HIS COUNT TO FOUR.
SU (SSK)
AS TOKIWA HAS TAKEN HOME THIS LAST RELIC...

"...COMPRISES ONE'S SUCCESSION TO THE SACRED SEAT."
"COLLECTING ALL THIRTEEN, AND THEN CONSECRATING AND DRINKING THE BLOOD OF ONE WHO BEARS THE BLACK MARK...



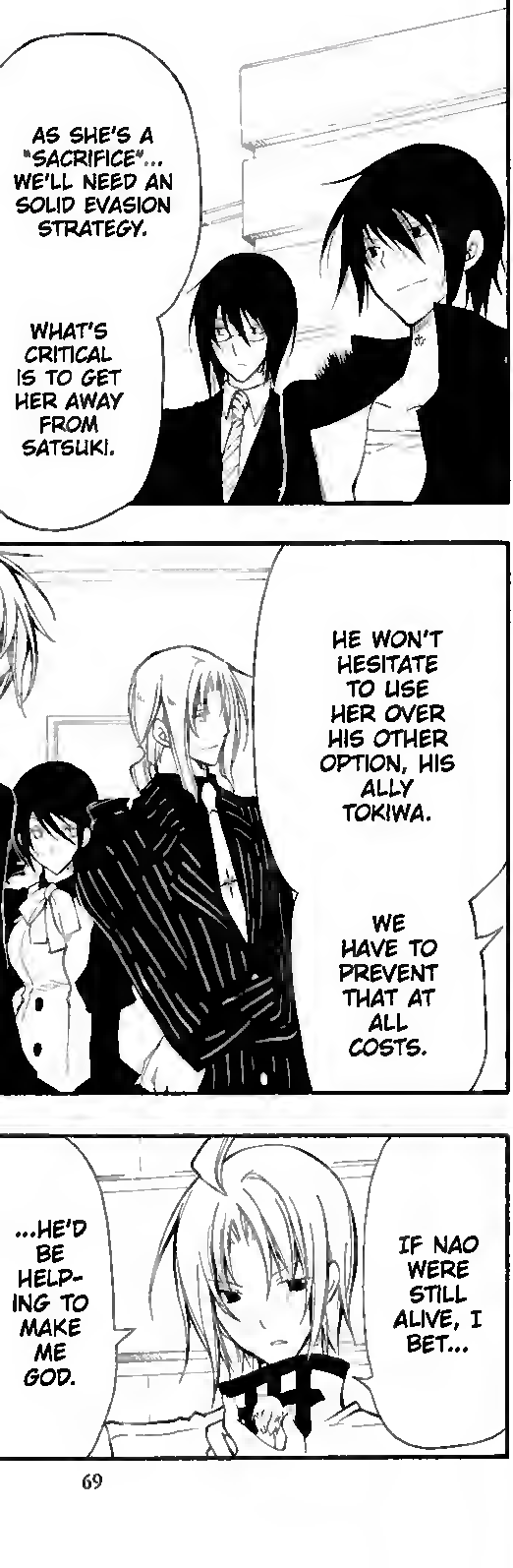
AND THAT MEANS I MUST...



...BY CLAIMING THE BOOK OF DA'AT AT THE COST OF HIS OWN LIFE.
II PROPHECY BOOK
KACHA CCHAK
I SWEAR I WILL NOT WASTE THE PATH TO VICTORY NAO LAID FOR ME...

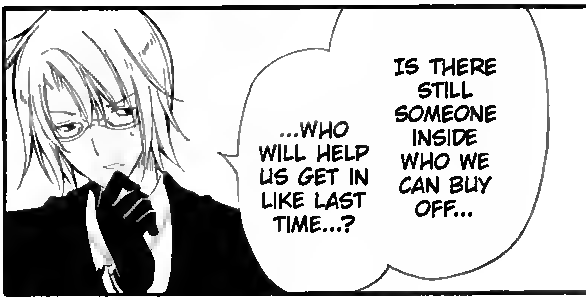
YEAH...
NO MATTER HOW I LOOK AT IT, OUR TOP PRIORITY...
BAN (BAM)
...IS TO SPRING TSUKI-MIYA!
HE WON'T HESITATE TO USE HER OVER HIS OTHER OPTION, HIS ALLY TOKIWA.
WE HAVE TO PREVENT THAT AT ALL COSTS.
AS SHE'S A "SACRIFICE"... WE'LL NEED AN SOLID EVASION STRATEGY.
WHAT'S CRITICAL IS TO GET HER AWAY FROM SATSUKI.
IF NAO WERE STILL ALIVE, I BET...
...HE'D BE HELP-ING TO MAKE ME GOD.

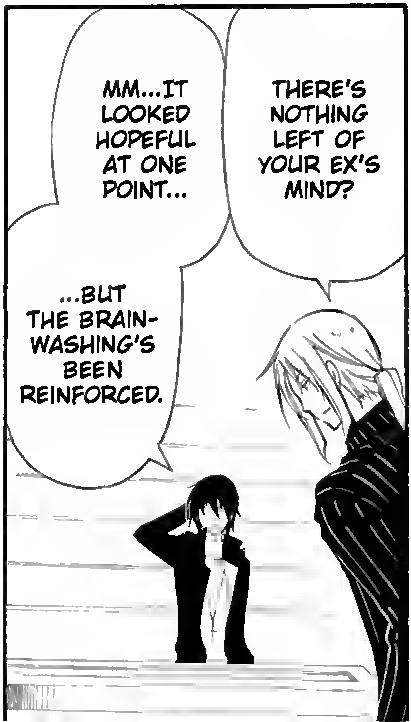
...IS TO SPRING TSUKI-MIYA!
BAN (BANG)
YEAH...
NO MATTER HOW I LOOK AT IT, OUR TOP PRIORITY...

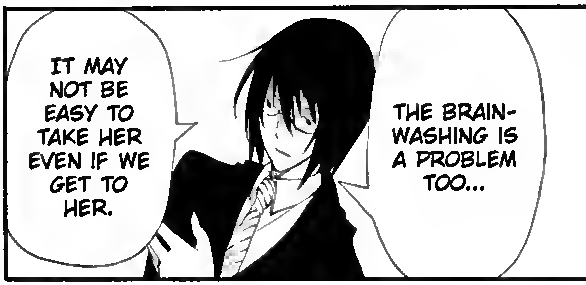

AS SHE'S A "SACRIFICE"... WE'LL NEED AN SOLID EVASION STRATEGY.
WHAT'S CRITICAL IS TO GET HER AWAY FROM SATSUKI.
HE WON'T HESITATE TO USE HER OVER HIS OTHER OPTION, HIS ALLY TOKIWA.
WE HAVE TO PREVENT THAT AT ALL COSTS.
...HE'D BE HELP-ING TO MAKE ME GOD.
IF NAO WERE STILL ALIVE, I BET...

I GOTTA WIN THE CRUSADES...
...AND BECOME GOD TO HONOR HIM TOO.
TON CTNKO

ARCANA WILL LEND YOU OUR AID, OF COURSE.
BUT HOW ARE WE GONNA BREAK HER OUT?
RUN STRAIGHT INTO KAMU-HABURI HEADQUAR-TERS?


IS THERE STILL SOMEONE INSIDE WHO WE CAN BUY OFF...
...WHO WILL HELP US GET IN LIKE LAST TIME...?

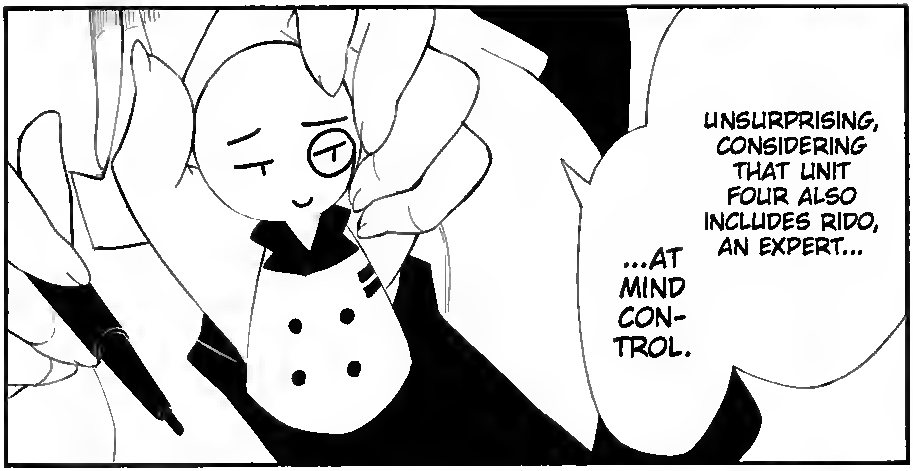

THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OF YOUR EX'S MIND?
MM...IT LOOKED HOPEFUL AT ONE POINT...
...BUT THE BRAIN-WASHING'S BEEN REINFORCED.

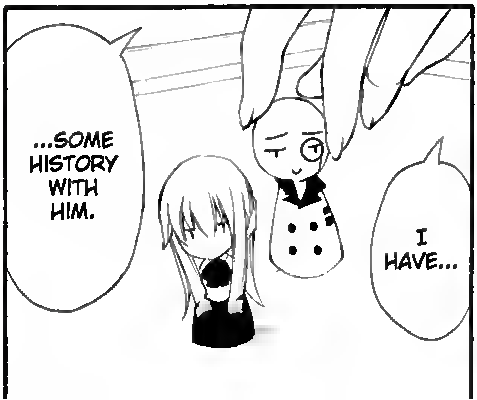

THE BRAIN-WASHING IS A PROBLEM TOO...
IT MAY NOT BE EASY TO TAKE HER EVEN IF WE GET TO HER.

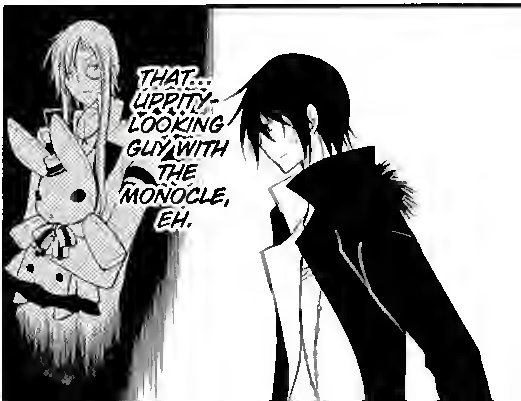
THEN THAT BRAIN-WASHING WILL NEED TO BE UNDONE FIRST.
MAKINO-KUN, ASSEMBLE A TEAM OF SPECIALISTS.
YES, SIR...! RIGHT AWAY!
...OR...
...IN-STEAD...
...WOULDN'T THE EASIEST AND FASTEST THING BE...
...FOR TSUKIMIYA TO RETURN TO US ON HER OWN?
KON (TAKO)
HEY, HEY... HAVE YOU BEEN LISTENING? WE JUST SAID IT'D BE NICE, BUT THERE'S NO WAY SHE'LL COME TO US ON HER OWN!
OH... SURE, YOU SAID...
KYUPO! (PWOP)
...HUH?
I MEAN...
...IT'LL BE INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT FOR US TO EXTRACT HER, RIGHT?
KACHA (KCHAK) KACHA

WHA ...?
きゅっ
KYU (SQIK)
KYU
...ISN'T SHE ASSIGNED TO UNIT FOUR?
IF I RECALL ...

...BUT IS IT TRULY IMPOS-SIBLE?


UNSURPRISING, CONSIDERING THAT UNIT FOUR ALSO INCLUDES RIDO, AN EXPERT...
...AT MIND CON-TROL.


...SOME HISTORY WITH HIM.
I HAVE...


THAT... URRITY-LOOKING GUY WITH THE MONOCLE, EH.

THUS...
...IF WE CANNOT GO IN AND EXTRACT TSUKIMIYA ...
...WHY NOT TRY TO WIN RIDO OVER TO OUR SIDE?

WHA ...!?
AW... IT'LL BE EASY.
SO LONG AS YOU ALL PLAY YOUR PART AND DO AS I SAY.
.....

NIYA (SMIRK)

PLEASE LEAVE EVERY-THING TO ME.
I HAVE...A DELIGHT-FUL PLAN. ♡

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 45
The Euphoria of Betrayal

ARCANA
WIN OVER...
...THE ONE WHO BRAIN-WASHED TSUKIMIYA... ALONG WITH HER?
NIKO (GRIN)
...YES.

ISN'T THAT THE EASIEST AND FASTEST WAY, NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT?
AFTER ALL, SHE'S ...
...BASICALLY A DOLL, BRAINWASHED BY RIDO AND CONTROLLED BY KAMU-HABURI.

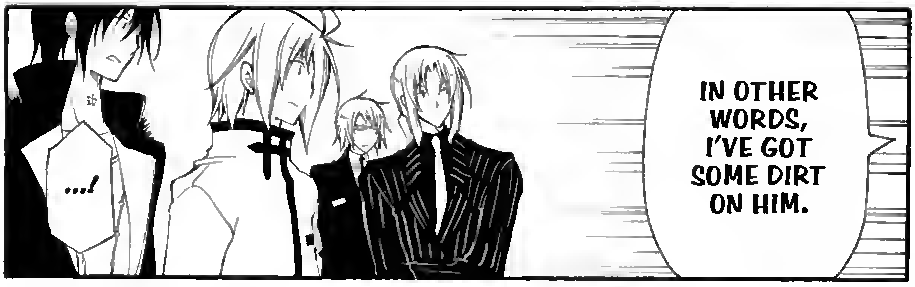
FOR HER CONDITION-ING TO BE UNDONE...
KACHA CHAKO
カチャ
...WOULDN'T BRINGING ALONG THE MASTER-MIND WHO'S BEHIND IT BE THE BEST WAY?

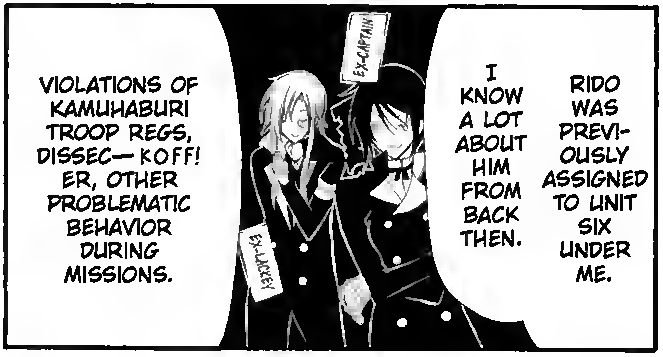
HEE.
EH HEH!
HEH!
BUT IF YOU FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS, YOU WILL GET IN AND OUT EFFORTLESSLY.

...BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO COME AND GO WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION LIKE KAMUHABURI.
YOU MAKE IT SOUND EASY...

?
SEE...

...AS IT HAP-PENS, I...
...KNOW SOME THINGS ABOUT RIDO THAT HE WOULDN'T WANT BANDIED ABOUT TO ANYONE. ♡


IN OTHER WORDS, I'VE GOT SOME DIRT ON HIM.
...!

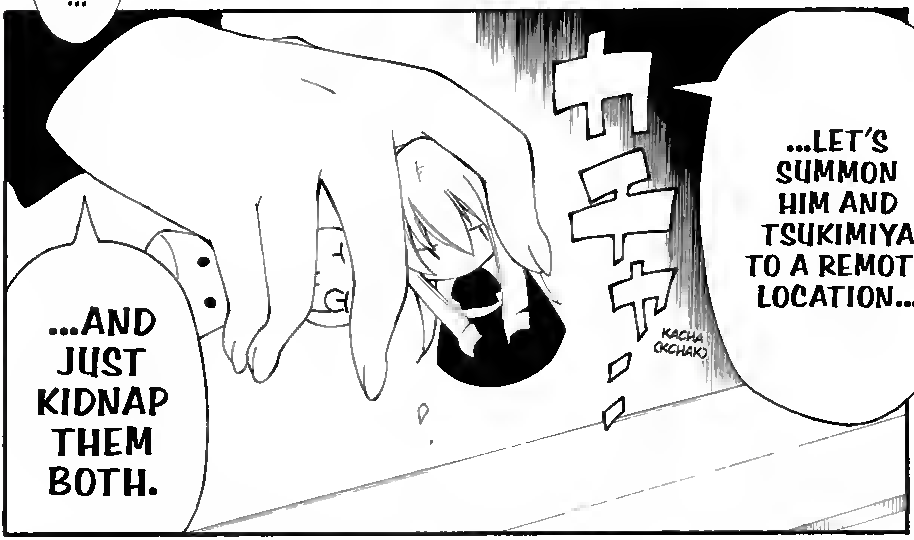

RIDO WAS PREVI-OUSLY ASSIGNED TO UNIT SIX UNDER ME.
I KNOW A LOT ABOUT HIM FROM BACK THEN.
VIOLATIONS OF KAMUHABURI TROOP REGS, DISSEC— KOFF! ER, OTHER PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR DURING MISSIONS.
EX-CAPTAIN
EX-LACKEY

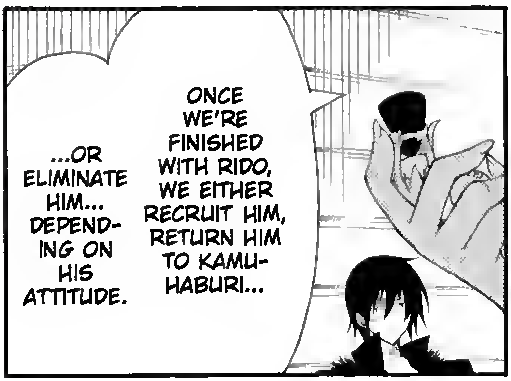
BET YOU HAD YOUR SHARE OF BAD BE-HAVIOR WHILE YOU WERE AN INFORMANT.
YES, WELL, IT DOES TAKE ONE TO KNOW ONE.
ANYWAY, IT'S INTEL THAT WOULD BE INCONVE-NIENT FOR RIDO.

A WHOLE PANOPLY...
NIKO
NIKO
...THAT COULD RESULT IN EXECUTION IF TOKIWA WERE TO FIND OUT.

MM...
WELL, WHAT I HAVE ON HIM IS CERTAINLY BIG ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM COOPERATE, BUT...
...LET'S SEE...
THEN...

...BUT SAY WE DO APPROACH HIM...
WOULD SOMEONE WHO'S DONE ALL THAT STUFF LISTEN TO US?


...LET'S SUMMON HIM AND TSUKIMIYA TO A REMOTE LOCATION...
KACHA (KCHAK)
...AND JUST KIDNAP THEM BOTH.


ONCE WE'RE FINISHED WITH RIDO, WE EITHER RECRUIT HIM, RETURN HIM TO KAMU-HABURI...
...OR ELIMINATE HIM... DEPEND-ING ON HIS ATTITUDE.

WE'LL HAVE HIM UNDO TSUKIMIYA'S BRAINWASHING AFTERWARD.

.....I'M OPPOSED.
OH...? TO WHICH PART?
I MET HIM TWO DAYS AGO, AND HE DIDN'T SEEM THE TYPE TO BE SWAYED INTO MEEK COMPLIANCE.
HE'S CONDE-SCENDING, AND I GOT A REAL BAD VIBE FROM HIM...
MY!
THEN LET'S DEFINITELY RECRUIT HIM!
PAAA (SPARKLE)
UNH!
ZUBISHI (JAB)
THAT SOUR-LOOKING FACE... IT'S MOST STIMULAT-ING.
GURI
GURI
GURI (DIG)
GURI
GURI
GRIMACE EACH TIME YOU SEE RIDO...
...AND IT WILL BE WELL WORTH PERSUAD-ING HIM.
YOUR NAIL IS SHARP!

WELL...
...IS THERE ANYONE ELSE...

...WHO HAS A PLAN THAT CAN BE LAUNCHED IMMEDIATELY?

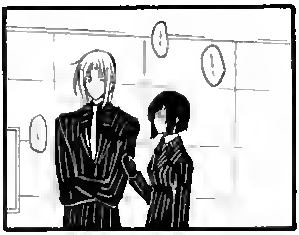
ガチャ
GACHA (KACHAK)
...LORD IZUMI.
MY APOLOGIES, BUT IT'S URGENT.

.....

.....

POMU (CLAP)
HOW EXCITING!
THEN...
...I TAKE IT WE'RE GOING WITH MINE?

SORRY... BUT THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED.
ARCANA MUST TAKE A STEP BACK AND SIT THIS ONE OUT.



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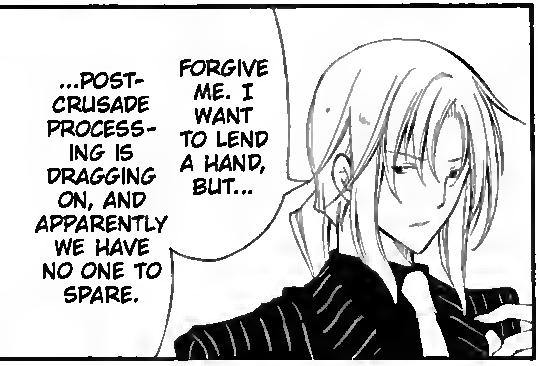

FORGIVE ME. I WANT TO LEND A HAND, BUT...
...POST-CRUSADE PROCESSING IS DRAGGING ON, AND APPARENTLY WE HAVE NO ONE TO SPARE.

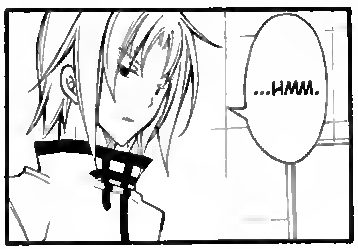
.....
...HEY!
AW, TOO BAD.

YO.
TON (TAP)
TON
.....

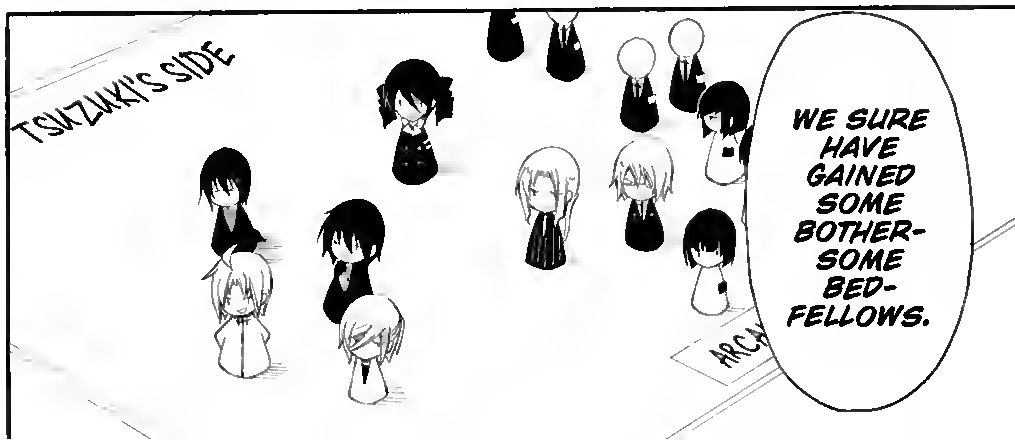
I HAVE NO ARGUMENT AGAINST SPRINGING TSUKIMIYA, THOUGH, SO PLEASE PROCEED.
BEST OF LUCK.

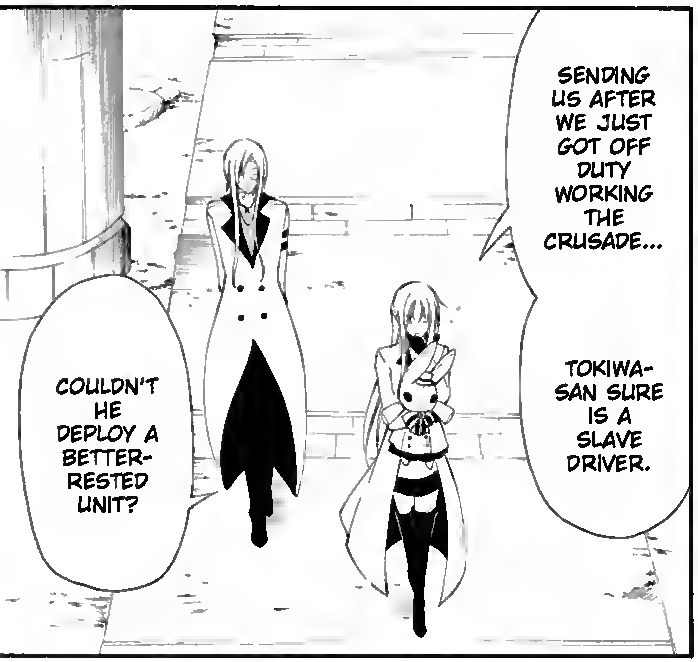
LOOK...
I WOULDN'T TRUST KANADE TOO FAR.
NOSHI (WHUMP)

...BUT IT COULD BE A PLOY TO ENTRAP US INSTEAD.
THIS PLAN OF HERS MAY LOOK LIKE SHE'S SCREWING WITH KAMU-HABURI...
SHE LOVES TOYING WITH PEOPLE, WHETHER THEY BE FRIEND OR FOE.

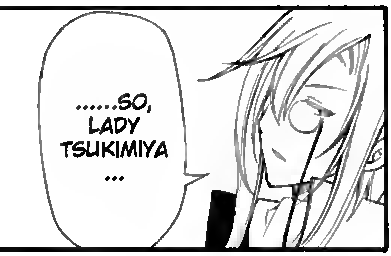

...HMM.

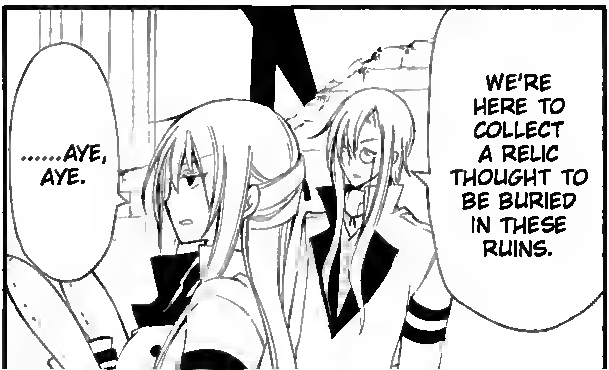
FOR REAL?
WELL... I DUNNO FOR SURE, BUT I'D KEEP MY GUARD UP.
YOU CAN'T PREDICT HER ACTIONS.

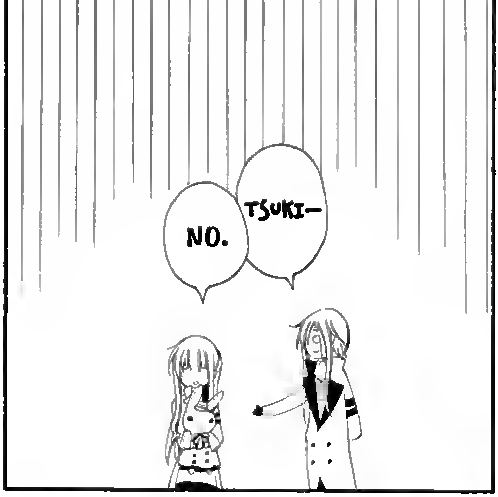

TSUZUKI'S SIDE
WE SURE HAVE GAINED SOME BOTHER-SOME BED-FELLOWS.

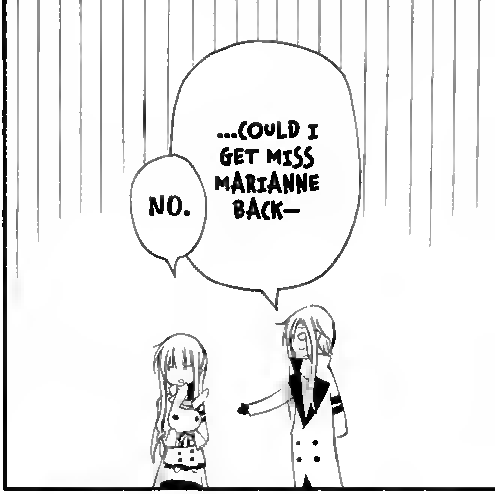

SENDING US AFTER WE JUST GOT OFF DUTY WORKING THE CRUSADE...
TOKIWA-SAN SURE IS A SLAVE DRIVER.
COULDN'T HE DEPLOY A BETTER-RESTED UNIT?

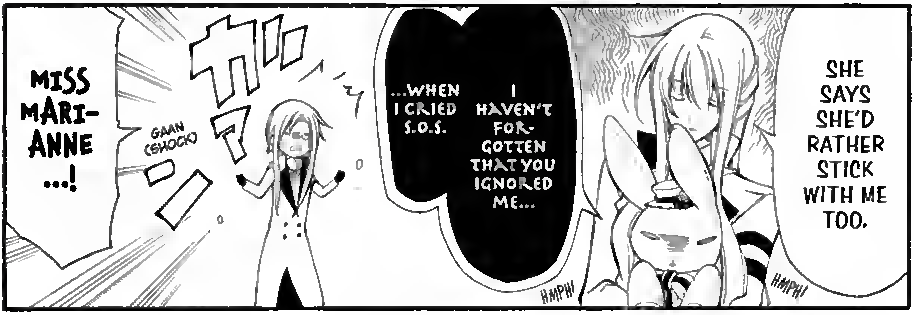
YAWN...

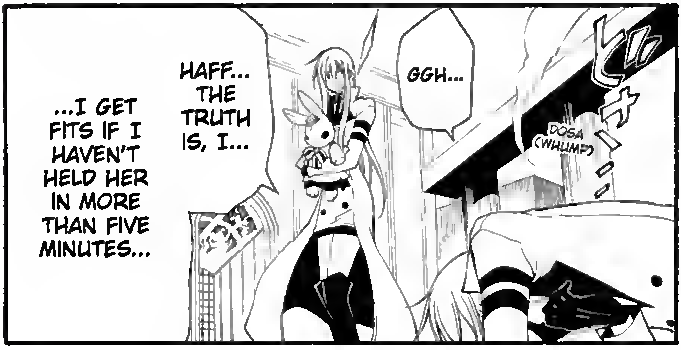

.....SO, LADY TSUKIMIYA ...


.....AYE, AYE.
WE'RE HERE TO COLLECT A RELIC THOUGHT TO BE BURIED IN THESE RUINS.

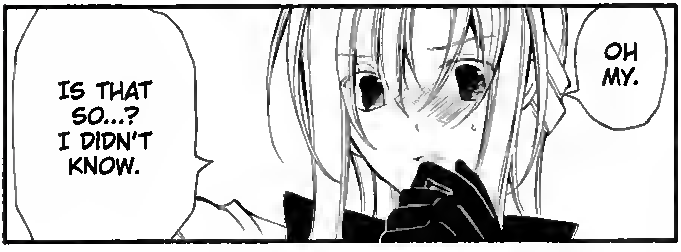

NO.
TSUKI—


NO.
...COULD I GET MISS MARIANNE BACK—


MISS MARI-ANNE ...!
GAAN (SHOCK)
...WHEN I CRIED S.O.S.
I HAVEN'T FOR-GOTTEN THAT YOU IGNORED ME...
HMPH!
SHE SAYS SHE'D RATHER STICK WITH ME TOO.
HMPH!


...I GET FITS IF I HAVEN'T HELD HER IN MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES...
HAFF... THE TRUTH IS, I...
GGH...
DOSA (WHUMP)

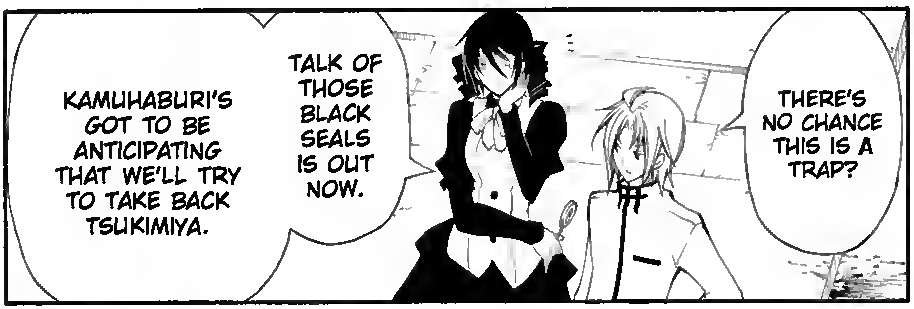
UNH!


IS THAT SO...? I DIDN'T KNOW.
OH MY.

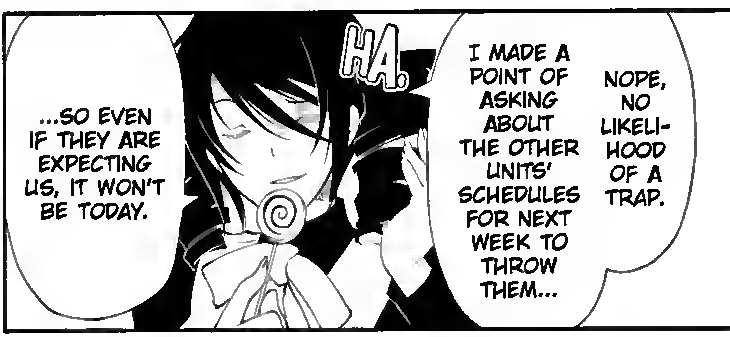
SO ICY, YET GENUINELY HEARTFELT— THEY REND MY SOUL TO SHREDS!
AHH! SUCH COLD WORDS ...!
SHALL I BURY YOU TOO?
ZUKYUUUN (SHOOM)
SUTA (STRIDE)
スタ
スタ
ALONE.
THEN WHY DON'T YOU JUST LIE THERE UNTIL I'M DONE?
SHOO. I'LL CATCH YOUR PERVINESS.
WAIT, PLEASE! DEAL ME MORE CONTEMPT ...!
HEH...OF COURSE HE DID
...AND HE REVEALED HE HAS A TASK AMONG THESE RUINS TODAY.
YOU SEE, I ASKED HIM FOR THE INSIDE SCOOP...
SOME PERV SHOWED UP, ANYWAY.
HE REALLY DID COME.
WITH TSUKIMIYA.

...YOU'RE AWFUL!
HAAH...
NOW, NOW.
FOR MY ENTER-TAIN-MENT.
YOU'RE SO SUSPICIOUS... DON'T WORRY. I'LL RECRUIT RIDO ONCE WE'VE KIDNAPPED HIM, JUST AS I SAID I WOULD.

OH? AREN'T THEY THE SAME?
NOT "EXTORTED HIM INTO SPILLING THE BEANS"?
"ASKED HIM"?
UH, NO.


KAMUHABURI'S GOT TO BE ANTICIPATING THAT WE'LL TRY TO TAKE BACK TSUKIMIYA.
TALK OF THOSE BLACK SEALS IS OUT NOW.
THERE'S NO CHANCE THIS IS A TRAP?

TCH!

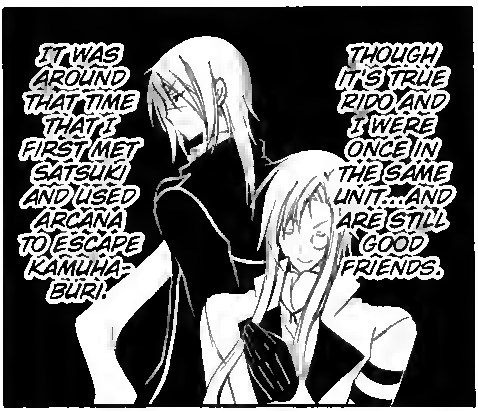

...SO EVEN IF THEY ARE EXPECTING US, IT WON'T BE TODAY.
HA.
I MADE A POINT OF ASKING ABOUT THE OTHER UNITS' SCHEDULES FOR NEXT WEEK TO THROW THEM...
NOPE, NO LIKELI-HOOD OF A TRAP.

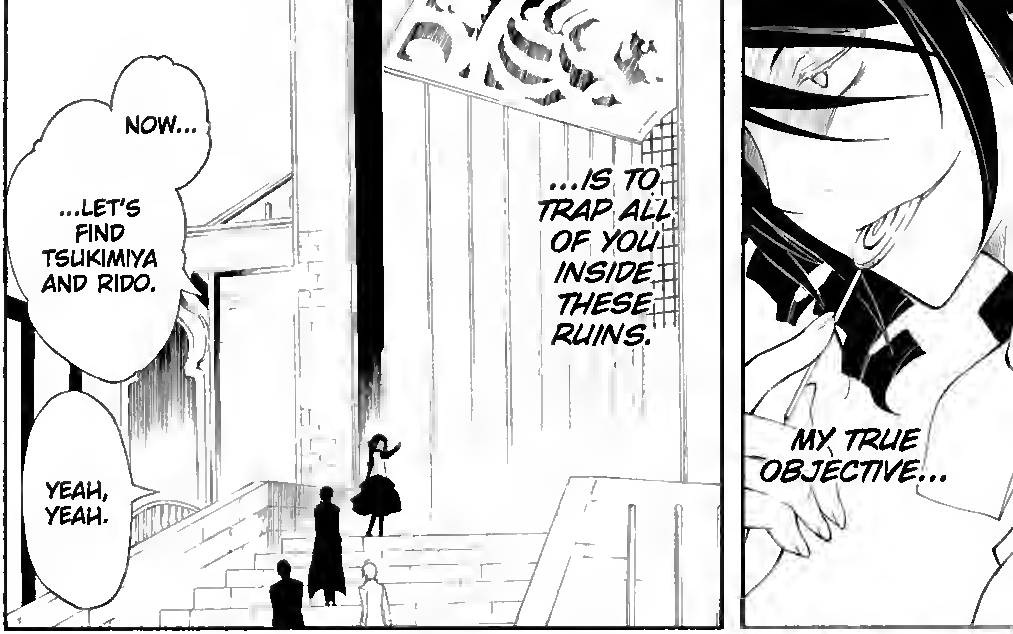
KYURARARARA (GLITTER)
キュラララ
PERHAPS I'LL ASK IZUMI-SAN FOR SPECIAL COMPENSA-TION.
AHH, I'VE REALLY GONE ABOVE AND BEYOND, HAVEN'T I!?

.....JUST KIDDING!

"WE'RE GONNA GET TSUKIMIYA BACK!" ...THAT WAS A BALD-FACED LIE.
MY DEAR FOOLS...

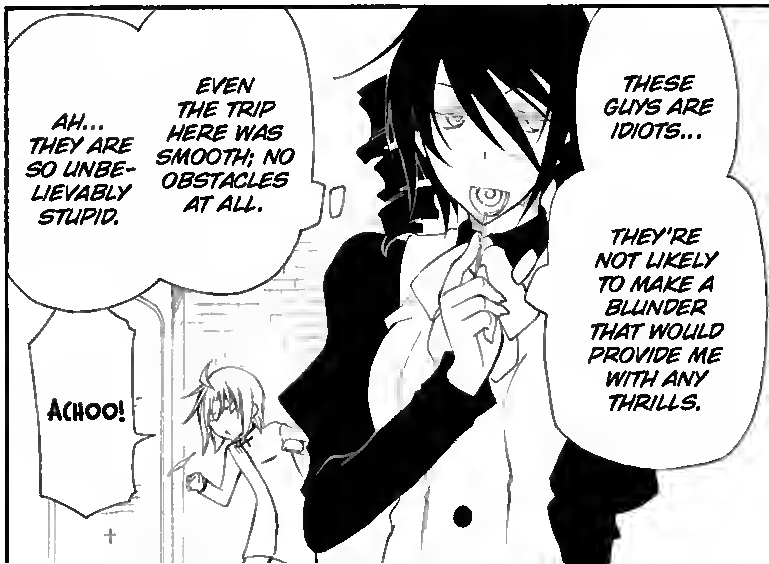
THAT'S RIGHT, JUST CARRY ON NOT PAYING ATTENTION.
KARI (CRUNCH)
UN-FAIR!
THAT IS UNFAIR.
I ATE A BEEF BOWL BEFORE I CAME.
GUKYUUU (GURGLE)
UNH...I'M STARVING.
YOU SHOULDA EATEN THAT BURGER!


IT WAS AROUND THAT TIME THAT I FIRST MET SATSUKI AND USED ARCANA TO ESCAPE KAMUHA-BURI!
THOUGH IT'S TRUE RIDO AND I WERE ONCE IN THE SAME UNIT...AND ARE STILL GOOD FRIENDS.


NOW...
...LET'S FIND TSUKIMIYA AND RIDO.
YEAH, YEAH.
...IS TO TRAP ALL OF YOU INSIDE THESE RUINS.
MY TRUE OBJECTIVE...

...IT'D BE BORING TO KILL THEM OUTRIGHT AND JUST TAKE POSSESSION OF TSUZUKI'S RELICS.
... STILL ...
KOTSU
KOTSU (TOK)
...MM. BUT...

...HAAH...


AH... THEY ARE SO UNBELIEVABLY STUPID.
EVEN THE TRIP HERE WAS SMOOTH; NO OBSTACLES AT ALL.
ACHOO!
THESE GUYS ARE IDIOTS...
THEY'RE NOT LIKELY TO MAKE A BLUNDER THAT WOULD PROVIDE ME WITH ANY THRILLS.

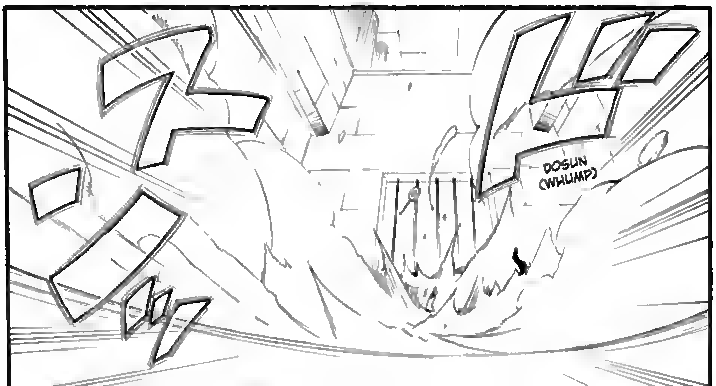
...STIR UP SOME EXCITE-MENT?
SHALL

GAKO (CLUNK)

!
HUH ...!?
NO WAY!

AH!

WHAT THE ...!?
OW...


DOSUN (WHUMP)

WEL-
COME...
...SILLY
FOOLS.
GOOD
EVENING,
LORD GOD
CANDIDATE
AND
COMPANY.
DO
SETTLE
DOWN
AND DO
AS
YOU'RE
TOLD,
WON'T
YOU?
RIDO...
— TSUKI-
MIYA
...!!

RIDO...
...WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
.....
LADY KANADE.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PHONE CALL EARLIER.
KOTSU (TOK)
I...DON'T RECALL LETTING ANYTHING SLIP DURING THAT CALL.
.....
.....?
PEKORI (BOW)
...TO LURE US TO THESE RUINS?
...YOU ONLY TOLD ME ABOUT HAVING BUSINESS HERE...
KASHAN (CLANK)
DON'T TELL ME...
...YOUR TRUE INTENTION WAS TO CAPTURE US...
...RIDO?
IS IT FAIR TO SAY...

...THEN "TURN COAT"...
YOU WERE TO SHOOT ONE OR TWO OF THEM FROM BEHIND ...
ER...? LADY KANADE... YOU'RE STRAYING OFF-SCRIPT.
...HUH!?
DON (BOOM)
.....
NI (GRIND)
...QUIET, EVERY-BODY.
PAN
PAN (CLAP)
AH, IS THAT HOW IT IS...?
...!
I HOPE YOU WILL FORGIVE ME.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT... I, RIDO, HAVE SNARED YOU ALL IN MY TRAP.
GOOD-NESS... YOU ARE A MOST CRAFTY VIXEN.

LORD TOKIWA WARNED ME TO BE ON MY GUARD...
...THAT YOU MIGHT COME FOR LADY TSUKIMIYA... OR RATHER, THE BLACK SEAL...
...THAT YOU MIGHT EVEN MAKE YOUR MOVE AS EARLY AS THE DAY AFTER THE CRUSADE.
IT IS MOST REGRET-TABLE.
.....!
MUKU (RISE)
OOF.
BA (GRAB)
GOTCHA!
!?
MFH !?
EH HEH
HEH
HEH
HO-HO-HO! I HEAR YOU CAN BLOCK ATTACKS YOU CAN SEE COMING AT YOU WITH "POWER WORDS."
SO I SHALL COVER YOUR EYES AND MOUTH!
TSU-ZUKI!

SU (GSK)
NOW...
...I BEG YOU TO STAY ROOTED EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE.
IF YOU MOVE...
...LADY TSUKIMIYA WILL RUN HERSELF THROUGH.
WHA ...!?
...YOU...
WE ONLY NEED TO PROTECT THE BLACK SEAL'S BLOOD BUT...
...ARE HOPING TO RECOVER LADY TSUKIMIYA ALIVE, NO?

NOW ...
...SINCE IT IS THE ATTENDANT WHO OVER-SEES YOUR RELICS' HIDING SPOT...
KACHA (CLICK)
...THE REST OF YOU ARE SUPER-FLUOUS.
!
HEY, TSU-ZUKI!
GET OUT OF—
UNH ...
GU (PRESS)
WELL ...
.....
...I'M SORRY, LORD GOD CANDI-DATE...
GU (SQUEEZE)
...BUT YOU NEED TO DIE.

DON
DBLAND
WHA
...!?
HUH?

PAN (BANG)
DO (SLUMP)
KANA-DE...!
...HEH.
ALL THAT'S HAPPENED IS MY FAULT.
...MY MIS-JUDG-MENT.
UNH... PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR...

I SWEAR, I'LL GET YOU ALL OUT OF HERE.
YOU LIKE THEM, DON'T YOU? THESE GARISH CHARADES OF "FRIEND-SHIP"?
GU (GRIT)
THAT WAY...
DON'T RESIST... RELAX AND TRUST ME.
JUST...
...PLEASE... HELP ME.
NI (SMIRK)
...I'M SURE THIS WILL BE...LOADS MORE FUN.
♡

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 46
The Concealed Deal

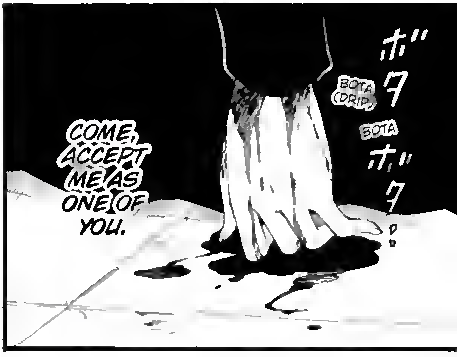
I SWEAR, I'LL GET YOU ALL OUT OF HERE.

JUST... PLEASE HELP ME.

THAT...
STIMU-LATING!
...WILL MAKE THINGS MUCH MORE FUN!

UNWAVERINGLY TRUSTING PEOPLE THEY DEEM "ALLIES"... IT'S LAUGHABLE.
THEY'RE SO NAIVE WHEN IT COMES TO FLOCKING BEHAVIOR.
AH, WE REJECT THOSE NOT-FRIENDS.
FRIENDS, YAY!
X
BUDDIES

RIDO IS IN MY CORNER...
ALL THAT'S LEFT IS FOR ME TO CARRY OUT MY CHARADE.


COME, ACCEPT ME AS ONE OF YOU.
BOTA (DRIP)
BOTA

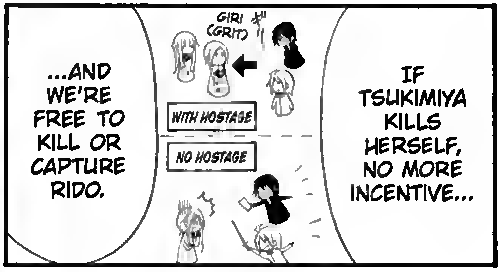
DAM-MIT... IT'S NO USE.
HE'LL KILL TSUKIMIYA IF WE MAKE A MOVE.
OH, YOU SILLY.
THAT HAS TO BE A LIE.

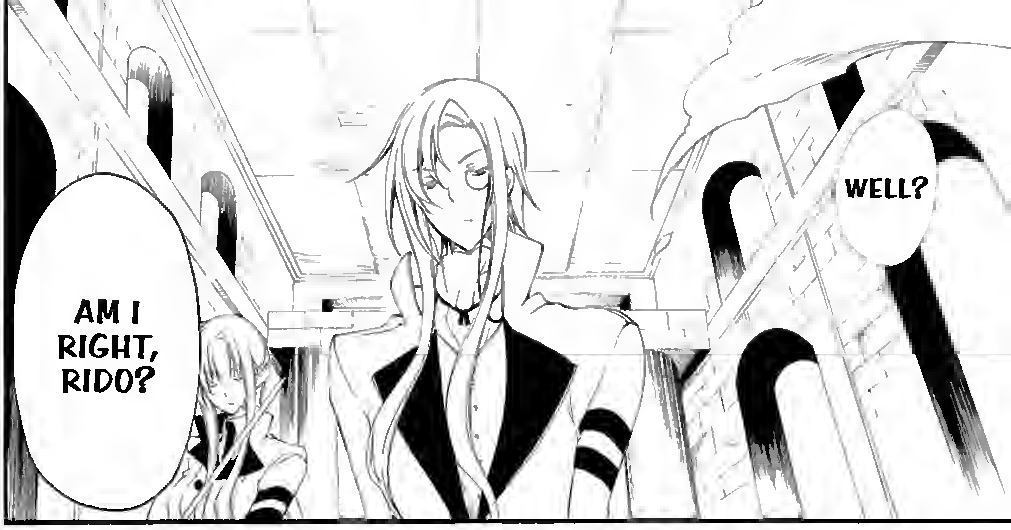
AND THE ONLY LEVERAGE HE HAS TO KEEP US COMPLIANT IS TSUKIMIYA.

LOOK. STAN-DARD METAL BARS MOUNTED IN A CRUM-BLING RUIN.
WHA ...?
SU (POINT)

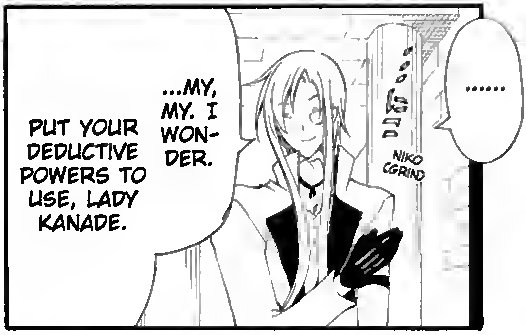
HIS ONLY HOPE IS TO KEEP US IMMOBILE.
...IT WOULDN'T BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO BREAK THROUGH THEM.
EVEN IF THE BARS ARE SOME-WHAT SOLID...

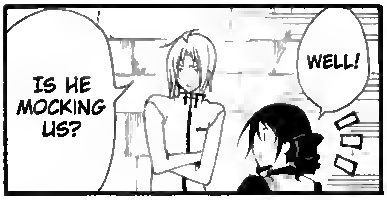
HE'D NEVER VOLUNTARILY GIVE UP HIS SOLE SHIELD.

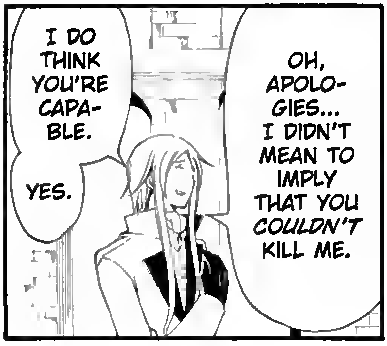

...AND WE'RE FREE TO KILL OR CAPTURE RIDO.
GIRI (GRIT)
WITH HOSTAGE
NO HOSTAGE
IF TSUKIMIYA KILLS HERSELF, NO MORE INCENTIVE...

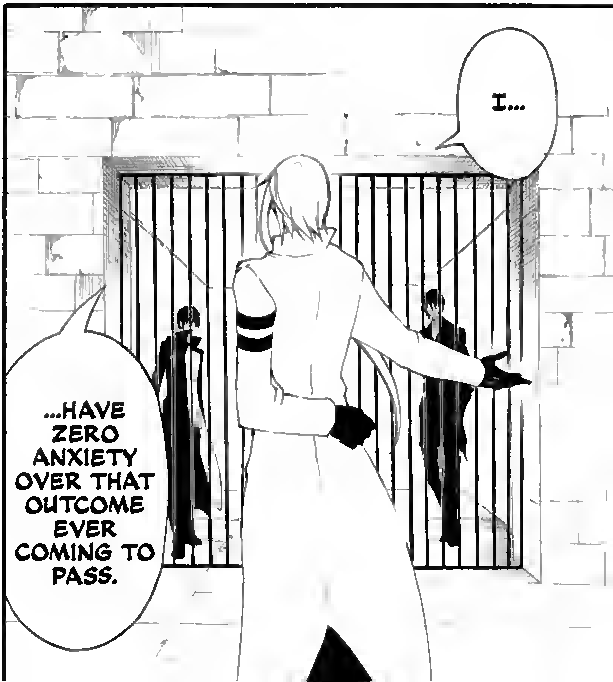

AM I RIGHT, RIDO?
WELL?

...REGARDING ANY FEAR I MIGHT HAVE OF "BEING KILLED" BY YOU...
THE ONE THING I WILL SAY...


PUT YOUR DEDUCTIVE POWERS TO USE, LADY KANADE.
...MY, MY. I WONDER.
.....
NIKO GGRIND


IS HE MOCKING US?
WELL!


I DO THINK YOU'RE CAPABLE.
YES.
OH, APOLOGIES... I DIDN'T MEAN TO IMPLY THAT YOU COULDN'T KILL ME.


I...
...HAVE ZERO ANXIETY OVER THAT OUTCOME EVER COMING TO PASS.

...BUT I WOULDN'T CONSIDER IT AN IMPERATIVE FOR ME TO CARRY OUT THAT DUTY.
TRUE...
...I DID TRY TO KILL YOU, LORD GOD CANDIDATE...
KOTSU (TOK)
IF I CAN'T FORCE YOU, I'M WILLING TO DEAL.
IT'S JUST... I'M FLEXIBLE.
(GASHA (CLATTER))
I...
...DON'T MIND RETURNING LADY TSUKIMIYA TO YOU...
...SINCE KAMUHABURI HAS ANOTHER BLACK SEAL IN LORD TOKIWA.
WELL, YES.
IT WOULD HAVE TO HAVE EQUIVALENT VALUE, YOU KNOW.
..... "TRANSACTION," HUH?
SO YOU WANT SOMETHING IN RETURN.
...OH, BUT THE OTHER MEMBERS OF KAMUHABURI ARE NOT AT ALL OF THE SAME MIND, OF COURSE, SO...
...THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE A SECRET TRANSACTION.
...WHAT I DESIRE MOST IS...
EVEN AT THE COST OF UPSETTING KAMUHABURI...

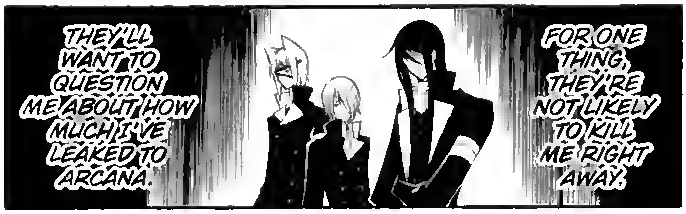
...LADY KANA-DE.
...PLEASE HAND THE KAMUHABURI TRAITOR OVER TO ME.

HUH?
WHA ...!?

LADY KANADE'S STANDING IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK.
IT'S QUITE THE DELICIOUS PROSPECT... IF I BRING HER IN...
...I MIGHT WIN THE VACANT CAPTAIN'S POST, OR PERHAPS SOME EVEN GREATER REWARD.
AND!
KUWA (FLUSH)
I SHALL BE IN CHARGE OF TORTURING LADY KANADE, OF COURSE!
HAAAAA (SWOOOO)
OH HOW DELECTABLE! MOST DELECTABLE ...!!
TCH... THIS IS NOT GOING THE WAY I WANTED!
OR RATHER, IF THEY DO AS HE SAYS, I WILL BE TORTURED!
AHA, SO SHE DOES FEEL PUT OUT.
OOOOOOO (WOOOOM)
PURU (TRMBL)
PURU
R...
RIDO .....
DOO (GAGE)

...MIGHT NOT BE ALL BAD.
.....THEN AGAIN, BEING HELD BY KAMUHABURI...

...NOT THE OTHERS.
RIDO WOULD SIMPLY PRETEND, BUT...


THEY'LL WANT TO QUESTION ME ABOUT HOW MUCH I'VE LEAKED TO ARCANA.
FOR ONE THING, THEY'RE NOT LIKELY TO KILL ME RIGHT AWAY.

BUT...
SU (STAND)

CURVEBALLS ARE PART OF THE ENTERTAIN-MENT... I'LL FIGURE A WAY OUT.
.....WELL, I'M THE ONE WHO DECIDED TO AD LIB ON RIDO TO BEGIN WITH.

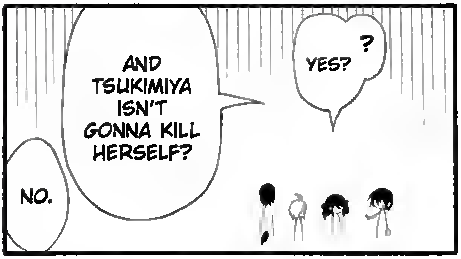
...TO GO BRAVELY FORTH...
...AND FACE A MARTYR'S DEATH SIMPLY ISN'T MY PERSON-ALITY.
A SPELL THAT WILL TAKE YOU BACK TO ARCANA.

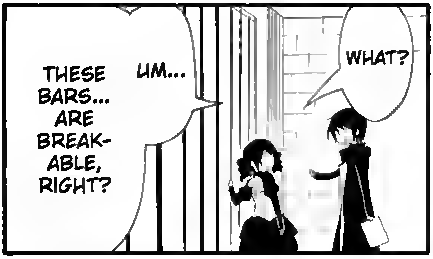
!
ドン
TON (THMP)

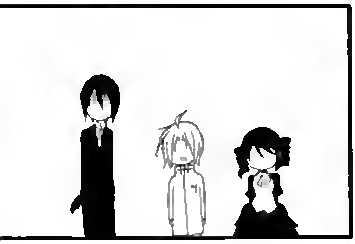
WAIT UP!

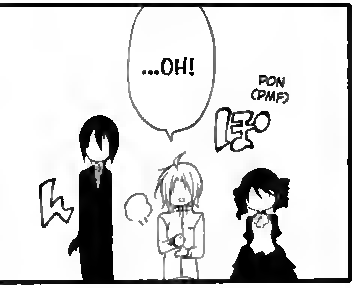
I HAVE ANOTHER FOR MYSELF, WHICH I'LL USE WHEN I SEE AN OPENING.
GOOD LUCK.
THERE! NICELY PLAYED, ME!

TCH...


AND TSUKIMIYA ISN'T GONNA KILL HERSELF?
YES?
?
NO.


THESE BARS... ARE BREAK-ABLE, RIGHT?
UM...
WHAT?

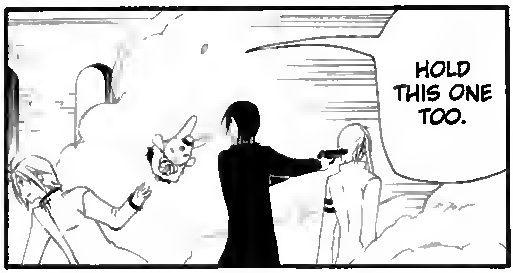



...OH!
PON (PMF)

THEN THERE ISN'T ANY REASON TO GIVE IN TO HIM!
LET'S JUST KIDNAP RIDO AND TSUKIMIYA LIKE WE PLANNED.

GASHAN (CLANG)
ナル シャン
DO (BOOM)
JA (KA-CHIK)
.....!

DO (FWOOM)
CAP-TURE!
ACTI-VATE!


HOLD THIS ONE TOO.

OH, IT'S ALIVE...
JITA (FLAIL)
JITA
LET ME GO!

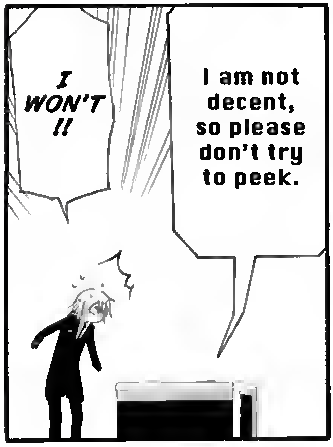
RIDO'S BEEN TAKEN.
THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.
BUTSU
BUTSU
BUTSU (MUTTER)
...AND TOP PRIORITY IN ANY EMERGENCY...
ZAA (SWOOSH)
GRAB HER!
I'LL GO AFTER HER TOO!
KARI (BITE)
...IS MY ESCAPE.
GEH!
IT'S GOL-LAPS-ING!
GURA (TEETER)
...!
THIS TOO WAS PLANNED FOR.
HYU (WOOSH)

DOON (KABOOM)
SORRY, BUT I HAVE NO IDEA.
WHAT ROUTE DID SHE TAKE?
.....
SHE GOT AWAY.
HELLO? WE'RE RETURNING TO YOU NOW.
ONE INJURED, AND ONE PRISONER PLUS A LITTLE... EXTRA ON THE SIDE...
HUP
USING THIS?
...ROG-ER.
KATSU (TAK)
KATSU
WE'LL RETURN TO ARCANA FOR NOW.
...THERE'S NOTHING ELSE TO BE DONE.

...OH!
LET'S GO, KANADE.
WHAT A GEN-TLE-MAN.
MY, MY, WHAT'S THIS?
SHUN (FWOOSH)
A SIGN OF DEEPENING TRUST? ♡
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

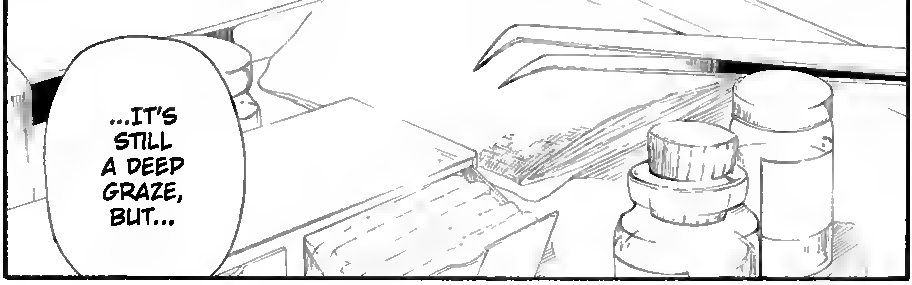
RIDO AND THE PLUSHIE HAVE BEEN PUT IN THE DETENTION CELL.
PATAN (SHUT)
THEY'LL BE RESTRAINED AND MONITORED AROUND THE CLOCK.

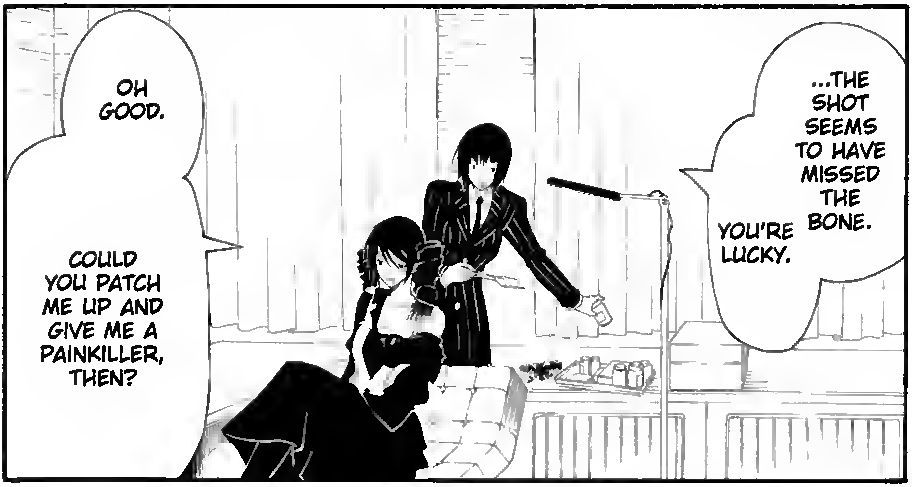
LET THE INSTIGATOR DO IT.
I'LL PASS.
YAWN I'M POOPED
WHAT ABOUT RIDO'S QUESTIONING?


I WON'T !!
I am not decent, so please don't try to peek.

KYORO (GLANCE)
INSTI-GATOR ...?

Hello, Makino-san.
I'm elsewhere, having Kuki-san treat my shoulder.
SLEEP~
HUH? WHERE'S KANADE?


...IT'S STILL A DEEP GRAZE, BUT...


...THE SHOT SEEMS TO HAVE MISSED THE BONE.
YOU'RE LUCKY.
OH GOOD.
COULD YOU PATCH ME UP AND GIVE ME A PAINKILLER, THEN?

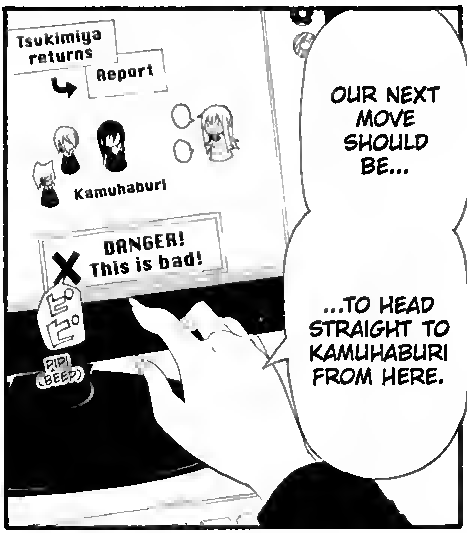
CONNECTED
We all overdid it today, what with the Crusade and then Tsukimiya.
Let her treat your wound properly, Kanade.

...YOU INTEND TO MOVE ABOUT? I DON'T RECOMMEND IT.
HEE.
PRETTY PLEASE? ♡

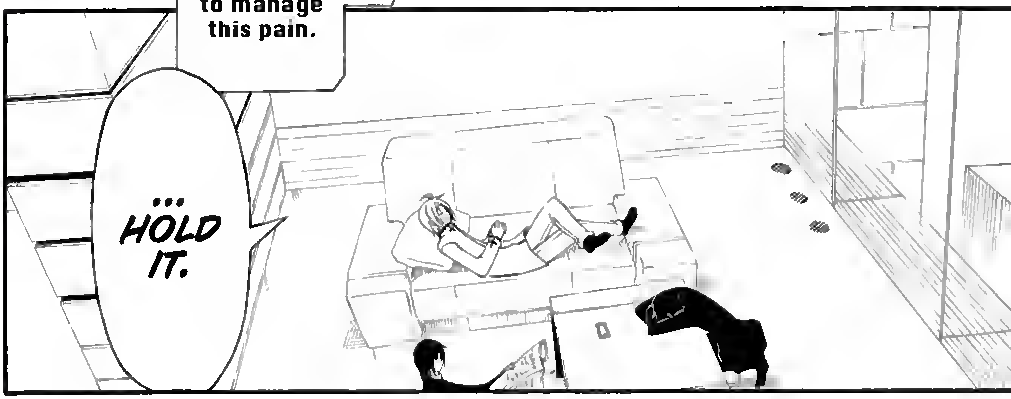
MY.
SUCH FOOLISH WORDS FROM THE ATTEN-DANT.
We won't last without rest.

KATA
KATA
...BEFORE THEY STRENGTHEN THEIR DEFENSES.
I THINK... IT'D BE BEST TO ATTACK THEM NOW...
...KAMU-HABURI WILL BECOME EVEN MORE VIGILANT.
IF TSUKIMIYA GETS BACK AND REPORTS IN TO THEM...

I ONLY NEED MY RIGHT ARM TO SHOOT.
.....
I MAY BE WOUNDED, BUT I'M FINE.


Tsukimiya returns
Report
Kamuhaburi
DANGER! This is bad!
PIPI BEEP
OUR NEXT MOVE SHOULD BE...
...TO HEAD STRAIGHT TO KAMUHABURI FROM HERE.

I can even drive...
...once I get something to manage this pain.


...HOLD IT.

"WHAT," MY ASS.
..... What?

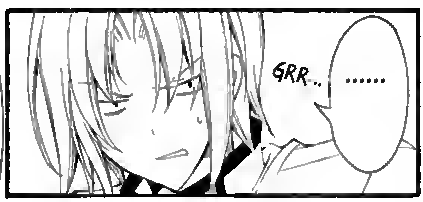
DIDN'T RIDO SAY...
...HOW MUCH KAMUHABURI WOULD LOVE TO GET THEIR HANDS ON YOU?
BI (SAD)
YOU'RE A FOOL TO GO WHERE YOU'LL BE KILLED!
POINTING AT HER THROUGH THE PHONE IS FOOLISH.
TSU-ZUKI.
WE'LL GO WITHOUT YOU.
YOU WAIT FOR ORDERS FROM ARCA—
GO (WHAM)
GYO (STARE)
GEEZ.
I THINK YOU'RE THE FOOLS.

KAMUHABURI IS NORMALLY NEUTRAL... BUT NOW THEY'VE ALLIED WITH YOUR ENEMY...
I WASN'T FINISHED TREATING YOU...
YOU'RE TRYING TO SEIZE A PROTECTED ASSET.
WITHOUT KNOWING THE ORGANIZATION'S INNER WORKINGS, YOU CAN'T HOPE TO SUCCEED.

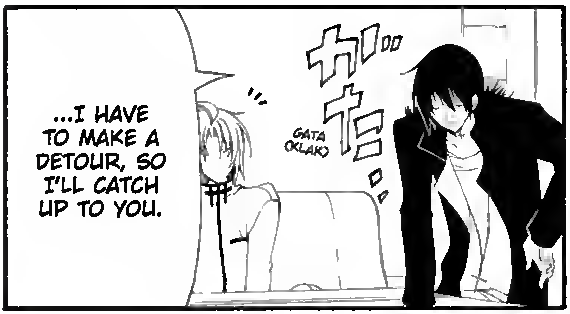
THEY ALREADY TOOK SOME DAMAGE WHEN OHMA AND I FLED...
...AND THE ENTRY POINT HAS BEEN REVEALED TO ARCANA.
THEY'LL BE LOOKING TO MOVE TO A NEW BASE...
...BUT THEY HAVEN'T YET.

WE MUST STRIKE NOW, WHILE I STILL KNOW HOW TO GET IN.
DAN (BAM)

.....ALL RIGHT.
PHEW
HOWEVER!


GRR...
.....

WHETHER YOU ACTUALLY GO IN WITH US OR NOT IS SOMETHING I WILL DECIDE ONCE WE'RE ON SITE.
GOT THAT!?
SURE, THAT'S ACCEPTABLE.

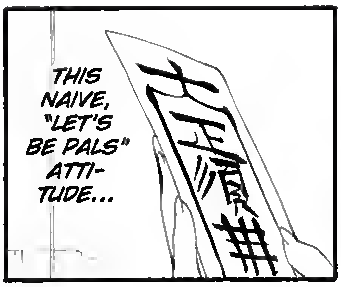

...I HAVE TO MAKE A DETOUR, SO I'LL CATCH UP TO YOU.
GATA (KLAK)

YOU'LL BE LEAVING RIDO HERE?
YES. SINCE I DON'T HAVE TIME TO QUESTION HIM.
OKAY.

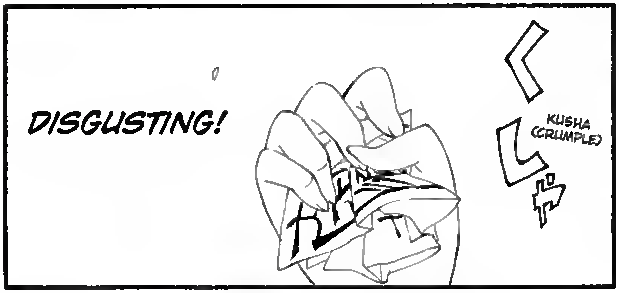
TSUKIMIYA'S BLACK SEAL IS BUGGING ME.
I WANNA CHECK SOMETHING.
FINE. JUST HURRY.

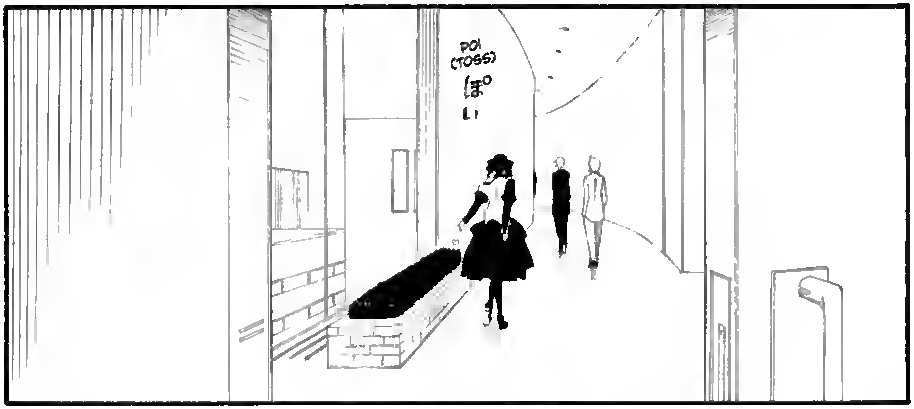
OH! THANK YOU SO MUCH.

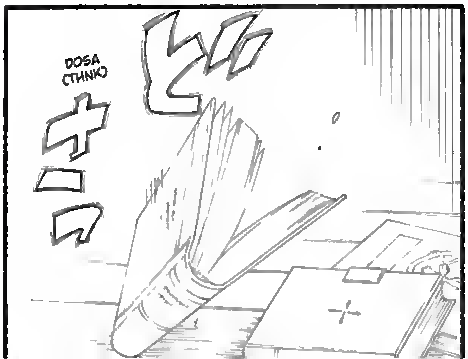
HERE. PUT THIS ON YOUR SHOULDER.
SU (SSIO)
IT'LL HELP SPEED UP THE HEALING.


THIS NAIVE, "LET'S BE PALS" ATTI-TUDE...

LET'S GO DOWN-STAIRS.
I'LL BRING THE OTHER CAR AROUND TOO. PLEASE WAIT OUTSIDE.
ZORO
ZORO (SHUFFLE)


DISGUSTING!
KUSHA (CRUMPLE)


POI (TOSS)


DOSA (THUD)

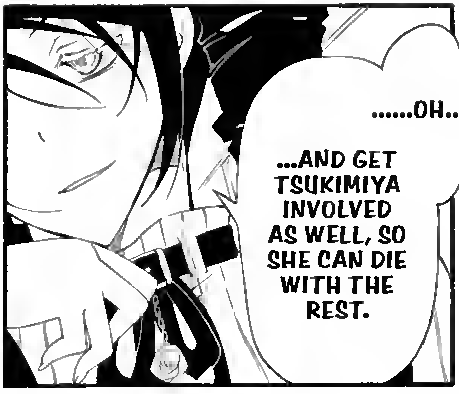
MMM... NOW WHERE DID I READ IT...?
IT WASN'T AT HOME, SO I'M PRETTY SURE IT WAS HERE.
... STILL ...
THAT NAO...
TURNING THE PLACE INTO A DUMP.
GOCHA (CLUTTER)
HASN'T HE EVER HEARD OF CLEANING?
BWAH!
ZU (SLIP)
UGH!
GON (WHACK)
IT STILL DOESN'T FEEL REAL...
NAO'S DEATH...
OWW
...SHIT.

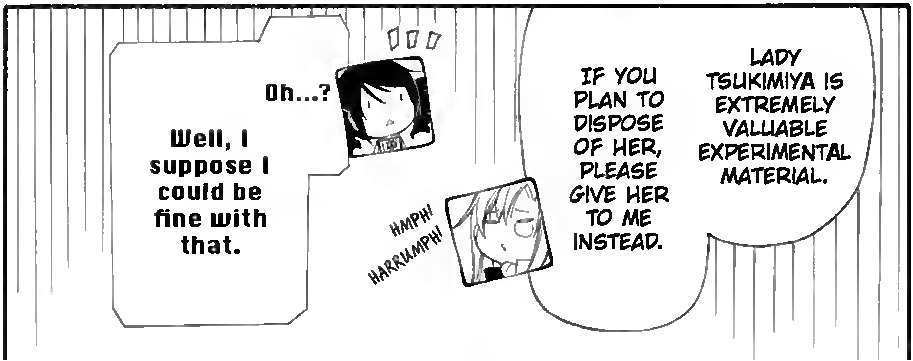
I'M ON STRONG MEDS. THERE'S ALMOST NO PAIN.
I SHOULD BE ALL RIGHT.
IT WON'T BE A PROB-LEM.
FINE.
How is your shoulder?
CONNECTED
...I'D SHOT YOU DEEPER THAN I INTENDED.
I was starting to worry...
CONNECTED
Whew, that's a relief.
Ah-ah.
Flattery won't win you anything, Aido.
YOU REALLY ARE A MUCH BETTER SHOT THAN I, LADY KANADE.

SO WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO?
They really are laughably simple-minded.
Though... thanks to you...
...Tsuzuki's bunch has started accepting me as one of them.
NOW, RIDO... DO YOU THINK I'LL BE SATISFIED WITH THAT?
Convenient... since Lord Satsuki has also ordered Lord Tokiwa to kill Lord Tsuzuki.
Desert them after they've trusted you to guide them in, and let Kamu-haburi deal with them?
WELL, THEN, MY DEAR.
WHATEVER DO YOU INTEND?
HEH...
NO, NO!
I WON'T GET ANY STIMU-LATION FROM SUCH A TEPIO SCHEME!
You are indeed trouble.

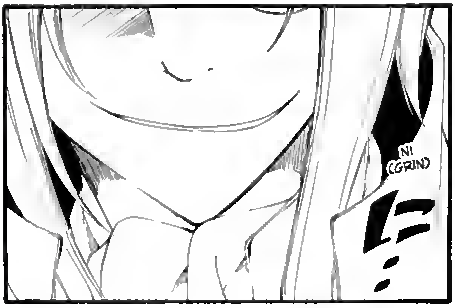
...HOW ABOUT INDUCING KAMUHABURI AND TSUZUKI'S BUNCH TO KILL EACH OTHER?
WHAT, INDEED?
.....
WELL...

WHAT ...?
I MUST VOICE MY OPPOSITION. THAT'S WASTEFUL.
Then Tokiwa can be the sole Black Seal.

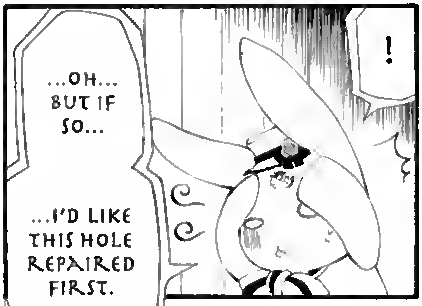

.....OH...
...AND GET TSUKIMIYA INVOLVED AS WELL, SO SHE CAN DIE WITH THE REST.

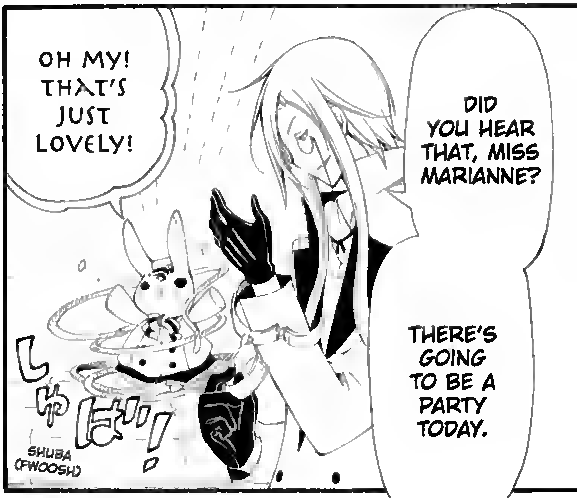

LADY TSUKIMIYA IS EXTREMELY VALUABLE EXPERIMENTAL MATERIAL.
IF YOU PLAN TO DISPOSE OF HER, PLEASE GIVE HER TO ME INSTEAD.
HMPH! HARKUMPH!
Oh...?
Well, I suppose I could be fine with that.

HEY, RIDO...
...I CHANGED INTO MY BEST OUTFIT, YOU KNOW.
THE ONE FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS.
CONNECTED
SINCE IT'S SHAPING UP TO BE A REAL PARTY...
...WHY DON'T YOU JOIN IN?
You can easily...
...slip Arcana's bindings, no?


NI
(GRIND)

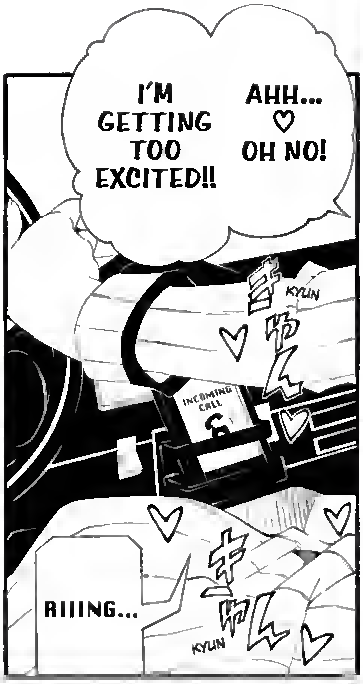
THIS IS
POISON.


...OH...
BUT IF
SO...
...I'D LIKE
THIS HOLE
REPAIRED
FIRST.
!


OH MY!
THAT'S
JUST
LOVELY!
DID
YOU HEAR
THAT, MISS
MARIANNE?
THERE'S
GOING
TO BE A
PARTY
TODAY.
SHUBA
(WHOOSH)

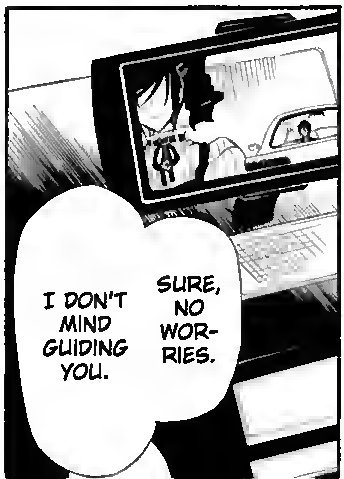
HYO!
(LIFT)

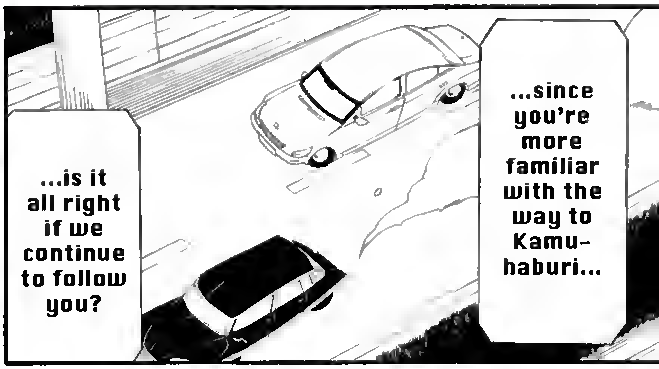
PRETTY LADIES OUGHTN'T RUSH THINGS, MISS MARIANNE.
OH? I THOUGHT WE HAD TO HURRY.
...MAY I BE SO BOLD AS TO OFFER TO SEW IT UP?
...THEN...
LET'S BIDE OUR TIME AND SET FORTH AT THE MOST OPPORTUNE MOMENT.
BESIDES... WE CAN LEAVE WHENEVER WE WANT.
AND I WAS POSITIVELY WITHERING AWAY AT KAMU-HABURI.
THEY CAN HARDLY HOLD A TEAM TOGETHER, YET THEY'RE SOFT AND DESPERATE FOR FRIENDS. IT'S APPALLING...
I NEVER LIKED TSUZUKI'S CREW TO BEGIN WITH.
HEH HEH...
BURORO (VROOOM)
I CAN'T WAIT!
AHH...
...I DID ENJOY BEING A PART OF THAT TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT.
AHH
STILL...!

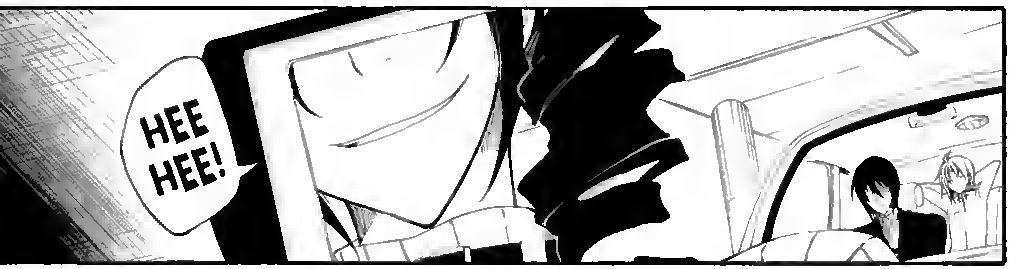

I'M GETTING TOO EXCITED!!
AHH... ♡ OH NO!
KYUN
INCOMING CALL
RIIING...
KYUN

BECAUSE I LOVE THAT FIERCELY STIMULATING FEELING I GET...
...WHEN I CHURN THINGS UP FROM THE INSIDE...!!! ♡♡♡
KYUN (SWOON)

KOFF!
Sorry to make you take point, but...
It's Hanamura.
.....
HELLO?

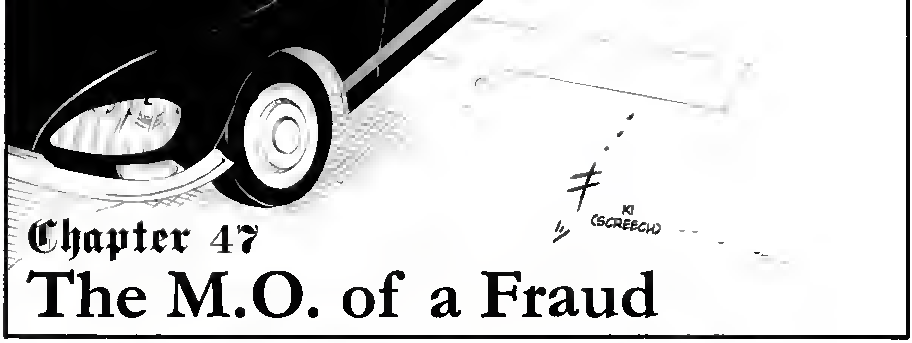

I DON'T MIND GUIDING YOU.
SURE, NO WORRIES.


...is it all right if we continue to follow you?
...since you're more familiar with the way to Kamuhaburi...

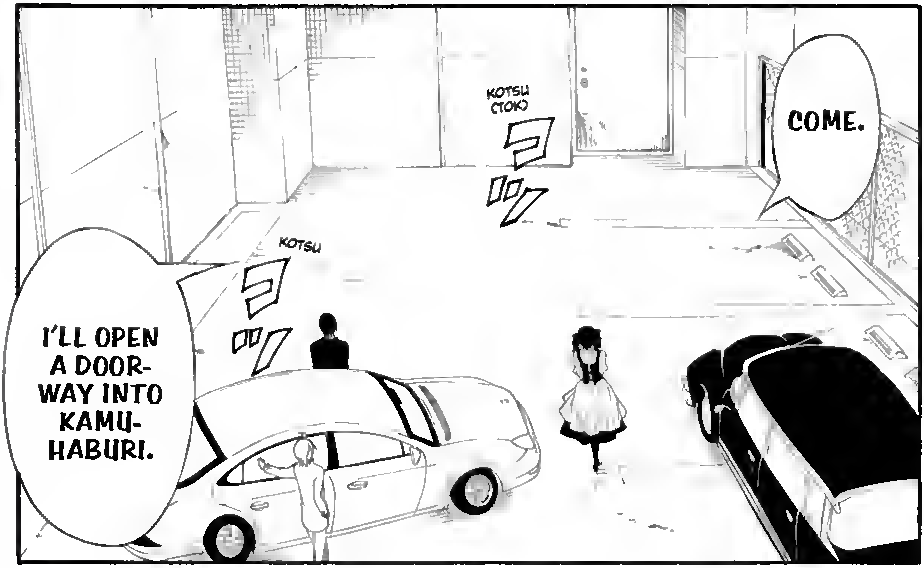


I SHALL HOST A THRILLING PARTY TODAY!

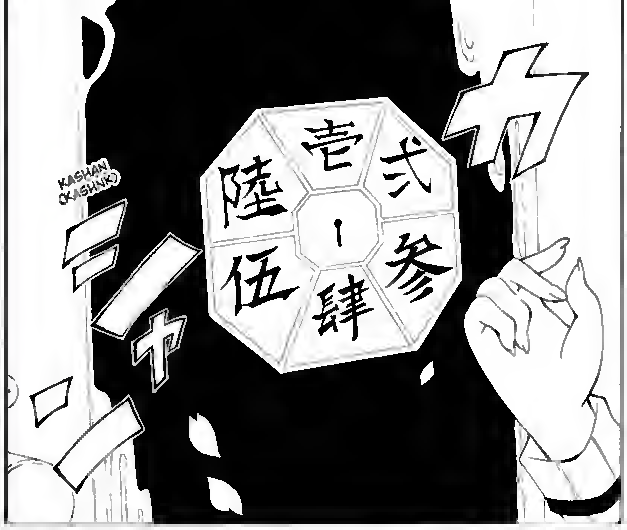
BLOODY CROSS



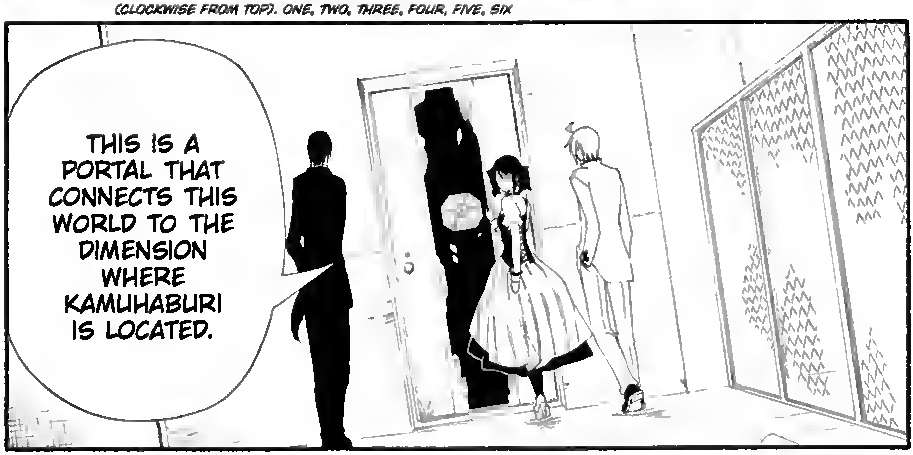
Chapter 47
The M.O. of a Fraud

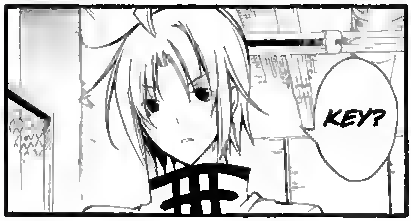


IT'S ONE OF SEVERAL ENTRY POINTS.
I CHOSE THE ONE THEY'D BE MOST LIKELY TO OVER-LOOK.
AN EMER-GENCY EXIT?
THERE'S AN ENTRANCE HERE?
YES.



LOCK
(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP). ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, FIVE, SIX





...THERE ARE ONLY A FEW THAT MY KEY STILL WORKS ON.
SINCE FLEEING FROM KAMU-HABURI...
...I'VE TRIED SEVERAL TIMES TO ACTIVATE VARIOUS PORTALS TO TEST MY ACCESS, BUT...

CHARI (CLINK)
THE ONE THING ...
...THAT CONNECTS KAMU-HABURI TO THIS WORLD...
...IS THIS KEY.
KACHI (CLICK)
I CAN CHOOSE A NEXUS WHERE NO ONE WILL BE.
NOPE.
THEY WON'T BE WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE?
NOW..... TIME TO SHOW WHAT I CAN DO.
I'LL PLAY THE PERFECT HOST...
GACHA (KACHK)

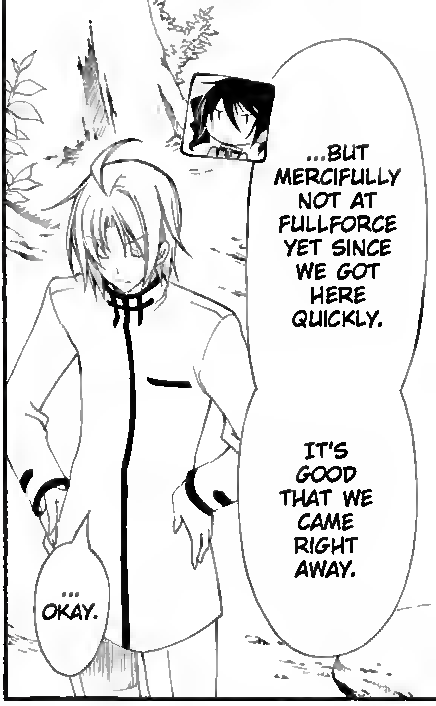
...AND PUT ON A THRILLING PARTY WHERE YOU AND KAMU-HABURI CAN SLAUGH-TER EACH OTHER!

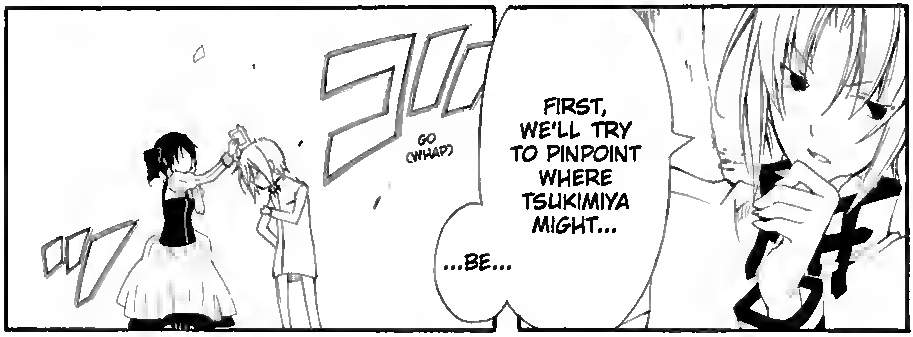
LET'S HIDE OVER HERE.
WE DON'T WANT TO BE FOUND.

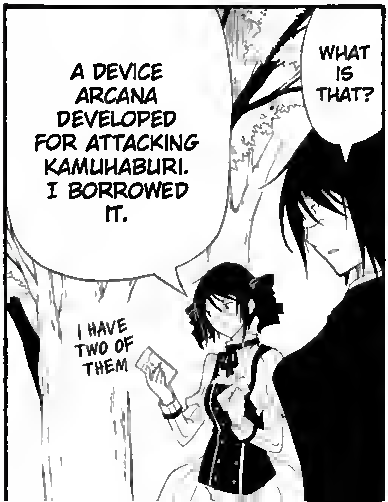
.....
THIS IS IT...?

HANA-MURA-SAN.
CAN YOU ASSESS OUR SUR-ROUNDINGS, EVEN IN BROAD TERMS?
SURE.
SHUUU (WHOOSH)
IT'S A CLEVER SETUP.
KUN (SNIFF)
ARMED TROOPS, LIKELY KAMU-HABURI.
FOUR AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE ESTATE...
...AND THREE EACH AT THREE POINTS NEARBY... LIKELY WITHIN HAILING DISTANCE.
SIMILAR POSTINGS AT THE SOUTH AND NORTH GATES.
OTHERS PATROLLING THE PERIMETER AND COURT-YARD.
I SEE.
TSUKIMIYA MUST HAVE RETURNED AND REPORTED IN.
SECURITY IS DEFI-NITELY TIGHTER THAN USUAL.

WE HAVE THE GENERAL LAYOUT OF THE INTERIOR MEMORIZED...
...SO WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET AROUND WITHOUT BEING CAUGHT.
KA-NADE.
YOU STAY HERE ON STANDBY.


...BUT MERCIFULLY NOT AT FULLFORCE YET SINCE WE GOT HERE QUICKLY.
IT'S GOOD THAT WE CAME RIGHT AWAY.
... OKAY.

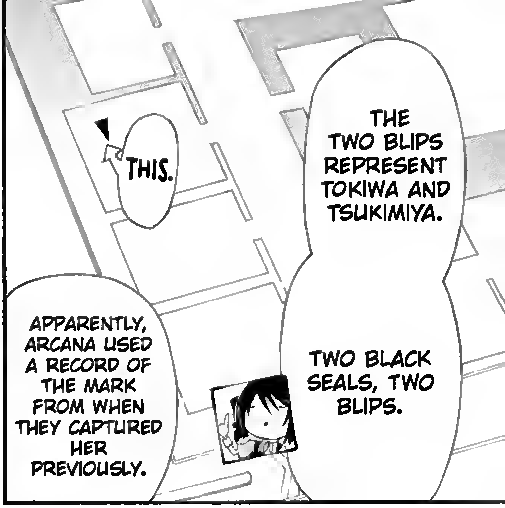

FIRST, WE'LL TRY TO PINPOINT WHERE TSUKIMIYA MIGHT...
...BE...
GO (WHAP)


A DEVICE ARCANA DEVELOPED FOR ATTACKING KAMUHABURI. I BORROWED IT.
WHAT IS THAT?
I HAVE TWO OF THEM

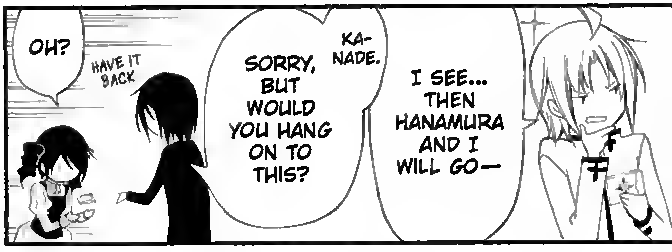
OH, PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
YOUR CARELESS WORDS CAUSED MY HAND TO SLIP.
GAAA (SNAP!)
YOU...! HOW DARE YOU HIT MY DELICATE CRANIUM WITH A BLUNT OBJECT...!!?
!!

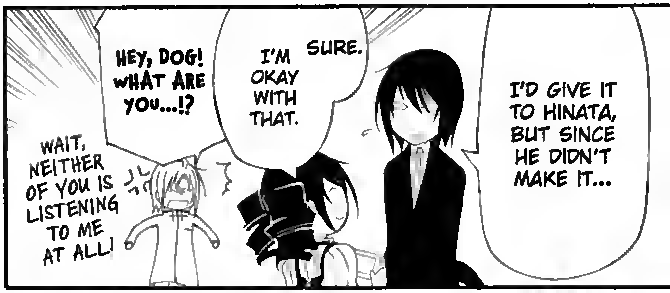
IT CONTAINS A DETAILED MAP OF THE HQ'S INTERIOR.
POI (TOSS)
GO AHEAD, TURN IT ON.
KACHI (CLICK)
OFF
...AND THE TWO BLIPS SUPERIMPOSED ON THE MAP ARE?
OH, IT'S MORE THAN JUST THE FIRST FLOOR
IT'S GOOD. REACTING PROPERLY.
Kamuihara HQ 1F
Details
Functions
HOME
PA (FLICKER)
THOSE DEVICES...
...ARE EQUIPPED WITH BLACK SEAL-SENSING RADAR.
BI (POINT)
...!

SO YOU'LL HAVE TO SPLIT UP TO ACTUALLY FIGURE OUT WHO'S WHO.
CORRECT.
...YOU CAN'T TELL WHICH IS TSUKIMIYA.
BUT...
WHEN DID THEY?
!


THIS.
THE TWO BLIPS REPRESENT TOKIWA AND TSUKIMIYA.
APPARENTLY, ARCANA USED A RECORD OF THE MARK FROM WHEN THEY CAPTURED HER PREVIOUSLY.
TWO BLACK SEALS, TWO BLIPS.

GO (WHALE)

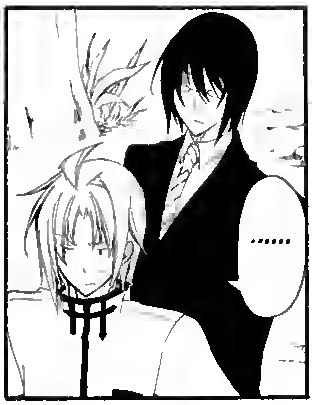

OH?
HAVE IT BACK
SORRY, BUT WOULD YOU HANG ON TO THIS?
KANADE.
I SEE... THEN HANAMURA AND I WILL GO—


HEY, DOG! WHAT ARE YOU...!?
I'M OKAY WITH THAT.
SURE.
I'D GIVE IT TO HINATA, BUT SINCE HE DIDN'T MAKE IT...
WAIT, NEITHER OF YOU IS LISTENING TO ME AT ALL!

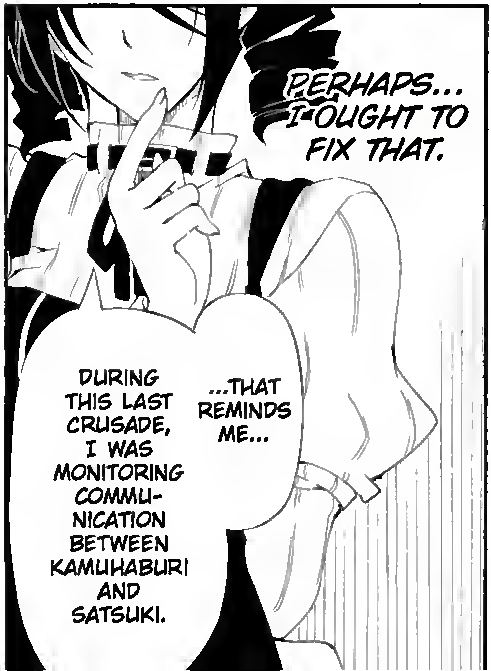
OWWW!
I'M SORRY! FORGIVE ME!
THE DEATH OF A GOD CANDIDATE WOULD BE THE ABSOLUTE WORST OUTCOME. IT WOULD INCONVENIENCE EVERYBODY.
GYAAAAA
GURI
GURI (GRIND)
GURI
GURI
GURI
YOU'RE NOT YET RECOVERED FROM THE SEVERE INJURIES YOU RECEIVED DURING THE CRUSADE BEFORE LAST.
YOU DON'T GET IT, MY FOOLISH MASTER.

IF I EVER HAVE BRAIN DAMAGE, I'LL KNOW WHO TO BLAME!
SO WHEN WE NEED HELP WITH TSUKIMIYA, WE'LL CALL Y—
HUH...? OUT OF RANGE?
...OH, RIGHT.
IT'S YOUR FIRST TIME HERE, ISN'T IT?
WHOEVER FINDS TSUKIMIYA FIRST SHOULD SECURE HER...
...BUT IF IT'S TOKIWA, RETREAT WITHOUT APPROACHING, RIGHT?
JIN (STING)
JIN
...YEAH.
THIS DIMENSION IS BASICALLY CUT OFF FROM THE OUTSIDE.
ONCE WE SPLIT UP, YOU'LL HAVE TO MUDDLE THROUGH ON YOUR OWN UNTIL WE RENDEZ-VOUS.
THERE ARE THE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATORS, THE AMANE, BUT I ONLY HAVE ONE, SO WE CAN'T CALL EACH OTHER
FOR REAL?
THAT WILL BE A CHAL-LENGE.
WHAT'S WORSE, AS I TOLD YOU WHEN WE ENTERED...
CHARI (CLINK)
...YOU NEED THIS KEY TO LEAVE.

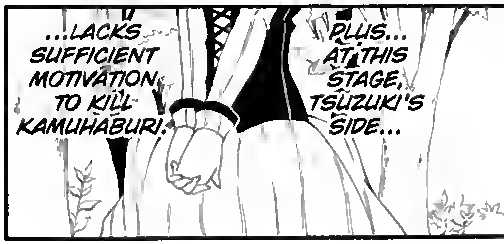
ONCE WE'RE ALL HERE, I'LL OPEN THE PORTAL, AND WE'LL ESCAPE.
YOU MUST RETURN TO THIS SPOT.


.....

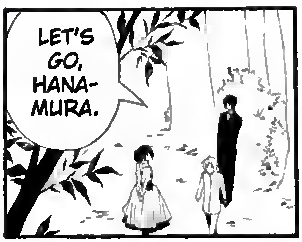
YOU'LL BE KILLED IF THEY CATCH YOU.
BE CARE-FUL.
...YOU WILL LIKELY HAVE BEEN DEEMED A THREAT FOR ALLYING WITH ME, A TRAITOR, TO KIDNAP RIDO.
IF TSUKIMIYA IS BACK ALREADY AND HAS REPORTED IN...


PERHAPS... I OUGHT TO FIX THAT.
...THAT REMINDS ME...
DURING THIS LAST CRUSADE, I WAS MONITORING COMMU-NICATION BETWEEN KAMUHABURI AND SATSUKI.

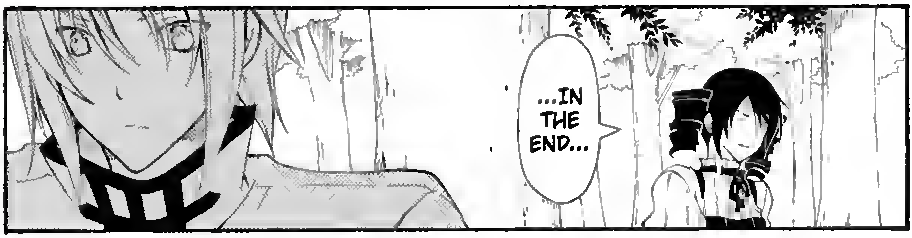
THEY MIGHT INSIST ON CALLING OFF THE PLAN.
!
SHOOT... DID I PUSH THEM TOO HARD?

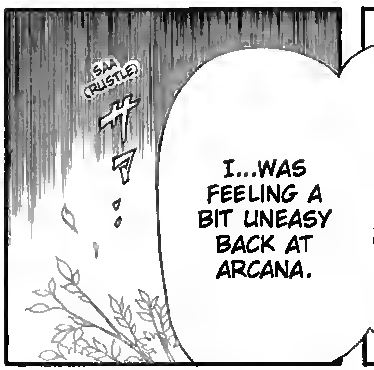

...LACKS SUFFICIENT MOTIVATION TO KILL KAMUHABURI.
PLUS... AT THIS STAGE, TSUZUKI'S SIDE...

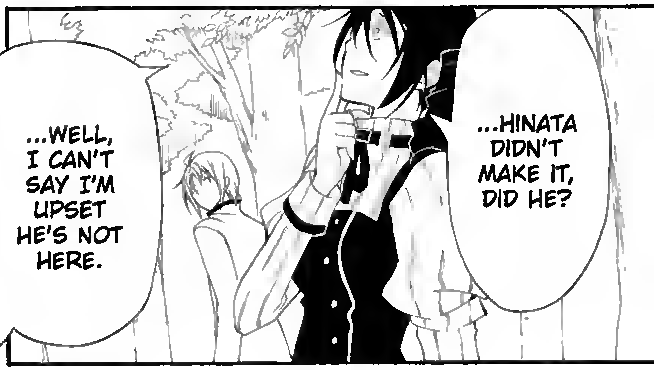
IT SEEMS THE ONE WHO ADVISED SATSUKI TO KILL NAO...
...WAS KAMU-HABURI.
...HUH?
OH... WERE YOU NOT AWARE?
I THOUGHT THAT...
...WAS THE MAIN REASON YOU'D DECIDED TO RETRIEVE TSUKIMIYA.
SHALL WE AVENGE NAO AS WELL WHILE WE'RE HERE TODAY?
.....
PISSES ME OFF
...ARE YOU KIDDING? THERE ARE ONLY THREE OF US.


LET'S GO, HANA-MURA.

HANAMURA AND I WILL TAKE THE RIGHT BLIP, YOU TAKE THE LEFT.
NO MORE DISCUS-SION.
THAT'S TRUE. YOU'RE RIGHT.

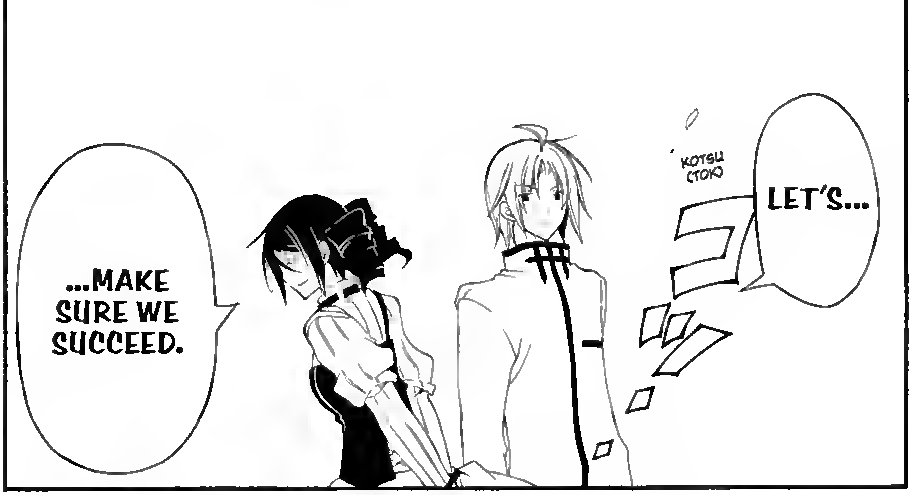

...IN THE END...


SAM (RUSTLE)
I...WAS FEELING A BIT UNEASY BACK AT ARCANA.
...WELL, I CAN'T SAY I'M UPSET HE'S NOT HERE.

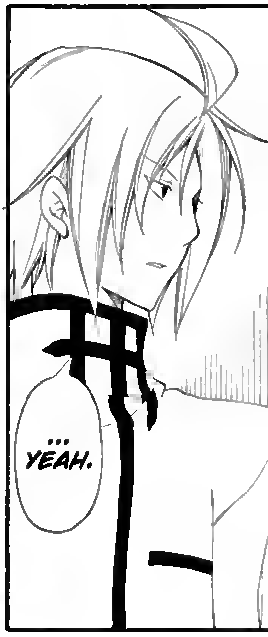

...HINATA DIDN'T MAKE IT, DID HE?

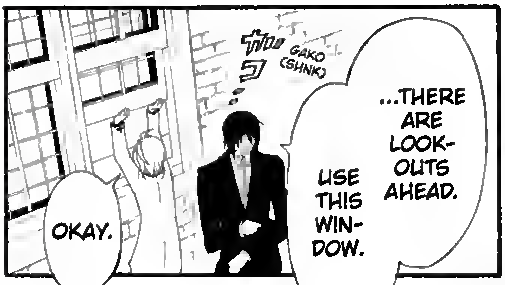
MAYBE THAT'S WHY NEITHER OF THEM CAME ALONG THIS TIME.
SAM (SHOOSH)
IT SEEMED LIKE IZUMI-SAN'S GROUP AND HINATA...
...WERE ACTING TOGETHER IN SECRET.

THINGS COULD BE DIFFERENT WHEN WE RETURN...
I'D BE VIGI-LANT.
.....HEH.
ALL LIES.
BLEH.
I SEE A LOT OF MERIT IN HELPING YOU WHER-EVER YOU NEED ME TODAY.
AFTER ALL...
KOTSU
KOTSU CTOKI
OH, YOU MAY TRUST ME UNCONDI-TIONALLY.
...I'M GETTING TO STRIKE AT MY DESPISED FORMER BRETHREN.
KOTSU
I WON'T HOLD BACK.
WE MUST SECURE TSUKIMIYA. SHE WILL BE CRUCIAL TO THE CRUSADES.
KOTSU
FOR YOU TO WIN AGAINST SATSUKI ...
...YOU NEED TO SOLIDIFY THE COM-BATANTS UNDER YOUR COMMAND.
KOTSU


KOTSU (TOK)
LET'S...
...MAKE SURE WE SUCCEED.

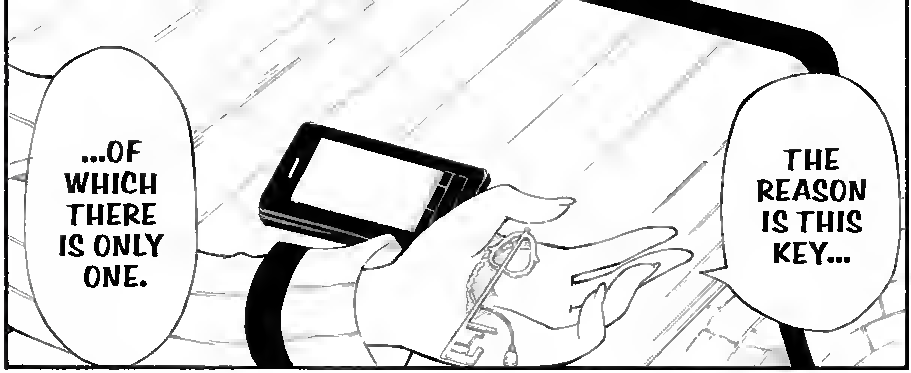
THAT'S A GIVEN.


...YEAH.


GAKO (SHNK)
...THERE ARE LOOK-OUTS AHEAD.
USE THIS WIN-DOW.
OKAY.

ABOUT WHAT KANADE WAS SAYING...
SHALL I SEE IF I CAN CONFIRM OR DENY ANY OF IT?
...TSU-ZUKI.
WE CAN'T MAKE CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE, SO IT'S NOT REALLY FEASIBLE.
IT'D BE A WASTE OF TIME.
...YES, BUT STILL...
WE CAN DO IT ONCE WE RETURN.
RIGHT NOW... FOCUS ON CARRYING OUT THIS MISSION.
HEH HEH...
WHAT UTTERLY STUPID MEN.

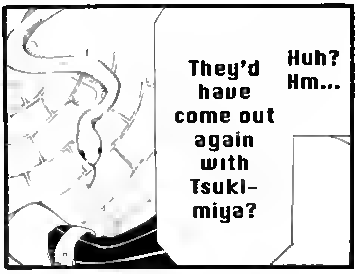
AHH.
DOSA (FLOP)
ACTING IS FUN, BUT IT'S TIRING AS WELL.
HARD TO WALK THROUGH THESE WOODS TOO
You sure were brilliant, though.
OH, RIDO.
I'M NOT ACTUALLY GOING. IT'S LUDICROUS.
Don't you need to head toward the other Black Seal blip?
HUH? IS THAT SO?
I have no intention of rescuing Tsukimiya or waiting for Tsuzuki at the exit.
Hey, hey ...
Then why did you come to Kamuhaburi?
AH, MISS MARIANNE, THAT IS...
...A BRILLIANT QUESTION.
Aren't Tokiwa and the others after you?

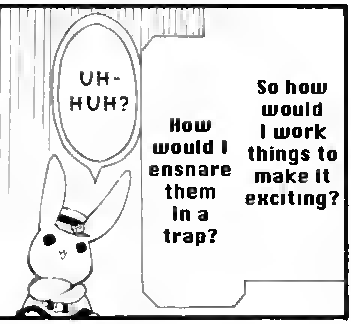

THE REASON IS THIS KEY...
...OF WHICH THERE IS ONLY ONE.

DAN (STOMP)

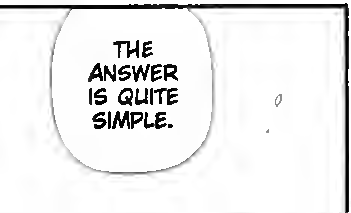
Key?
SHURU (SLITHER) SHURU
TELL ME, MISS MARI-ANNE ...
...WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF I'D GIVEN TSUZUKI THIS KEY AND LET THEM GO IN?

EXACTLY RIGHT.


Huh? Hm...
They'd have come out again with Tsuki-miya?

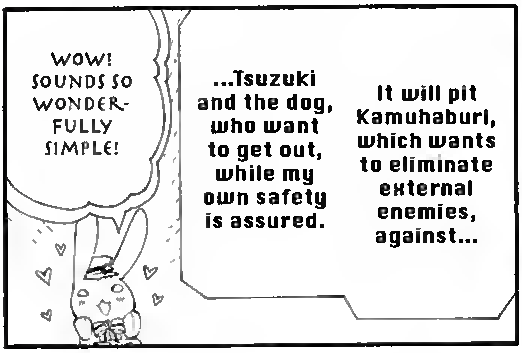

UH-HUH?
How would I ensnare them in a trap?
So how would I work things to make it exciting?

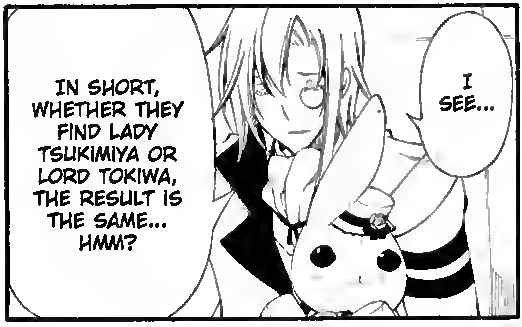
...AND...
...THAT WOULDN'T DO ME ANY GOOD AT ALL.
IT WOULDN'T PROVIDE ME WITH ANY STIM-ULATION.


THE ANSWER IS QUITE SIMPLE.

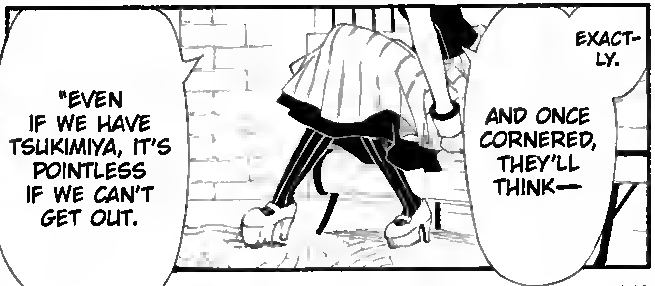
KAMUHABURI SPACE
KAMU-HABURI
...TAKING AWAY THIS KEY...
...AND MAKING MY OWN ESCAPE, SEALING THE EXIT BEHIND ME, IS BEST.
FOR THAT, ACCOMPA-NYING THEM INSIDE...

LOCK THEM IN THIS DIMENSION ...
...AND LEAD THEM INTO THINKING... THAT THE ONLY WAY THEY CAN MAKE IT HOME ALIVE IS TO KILL THE ENEMY.


WOW! SOUNDS SO WONDER-FULLY SIMPLE!
...Tsuzuki and the dog, who want to get out, while my own safety is assured.
It will pit Kamuhaburi, which wants to eliminate external enemies, against...


I SEE...
IN SHORT, WHETHER THEY FIND LADY TSUKIMIYA OR LORD TOKIWA, THE RESULT IS THE SAME... HMM?

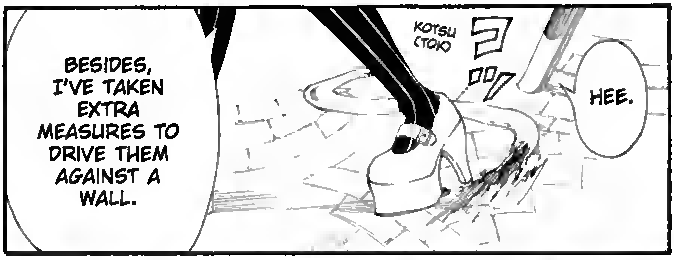
"HOW-EVER...

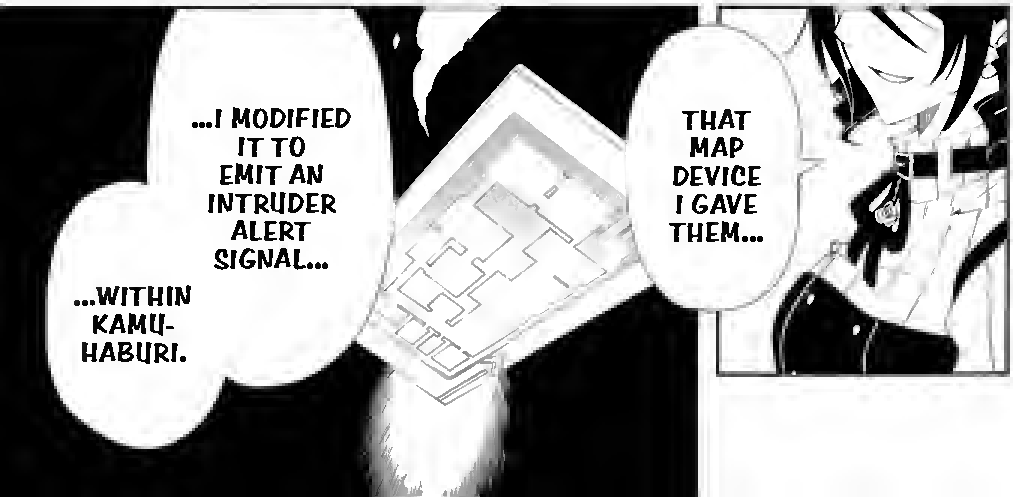

"EVEN IF WE HAVE TSUKIMIYA, IT'S POINTLESS IF WE CAN'T GET OUT.
EXACT-LY.
AND ONCE CORNERED, THEY'LL THINK—

"...IF WE WIPE OUT KAMUHABURI, OR AT LEAST KILL AN OFFICER AND SWIPE HIS KEY...
"...WE MAY STILL BE ABLE TO ESCAPE"..... WELL?

Ooh, what? What?
YOU WANNA KNOW?
Yes, yes, I do!
MY, YOU'RE SO PRECIOUS.

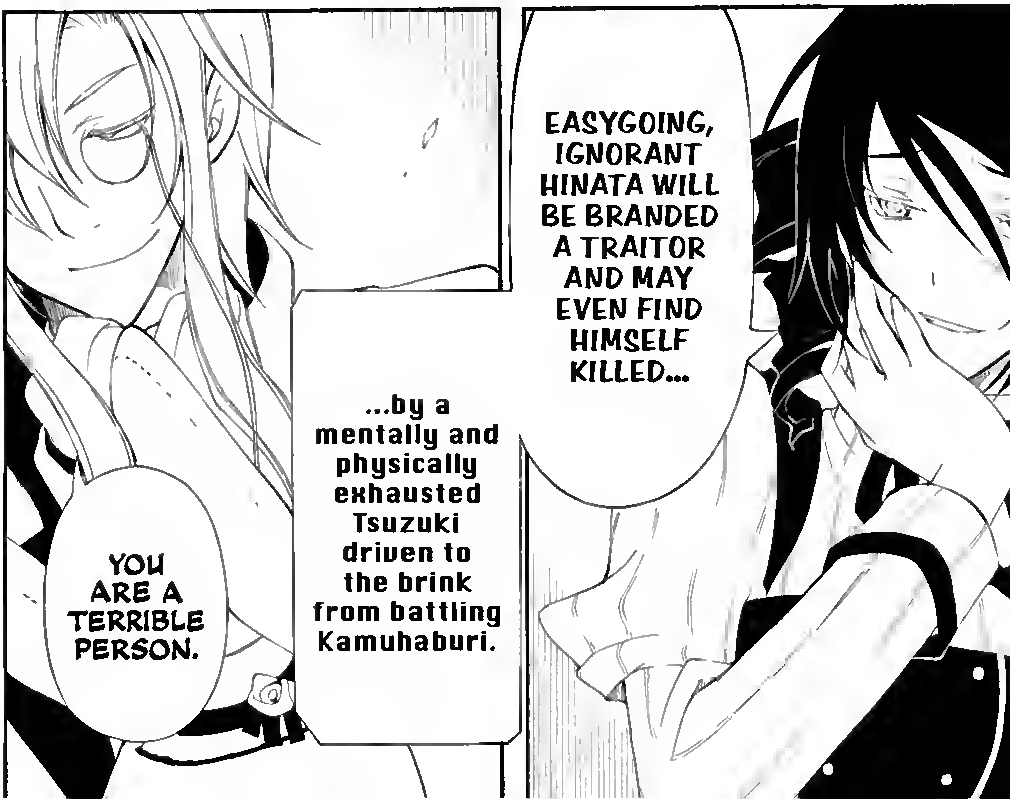
Oh?
Do you think they have the nerve for it?
WELL, I DON'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN.
BUT HUMANS ARE ADAPTABLE.

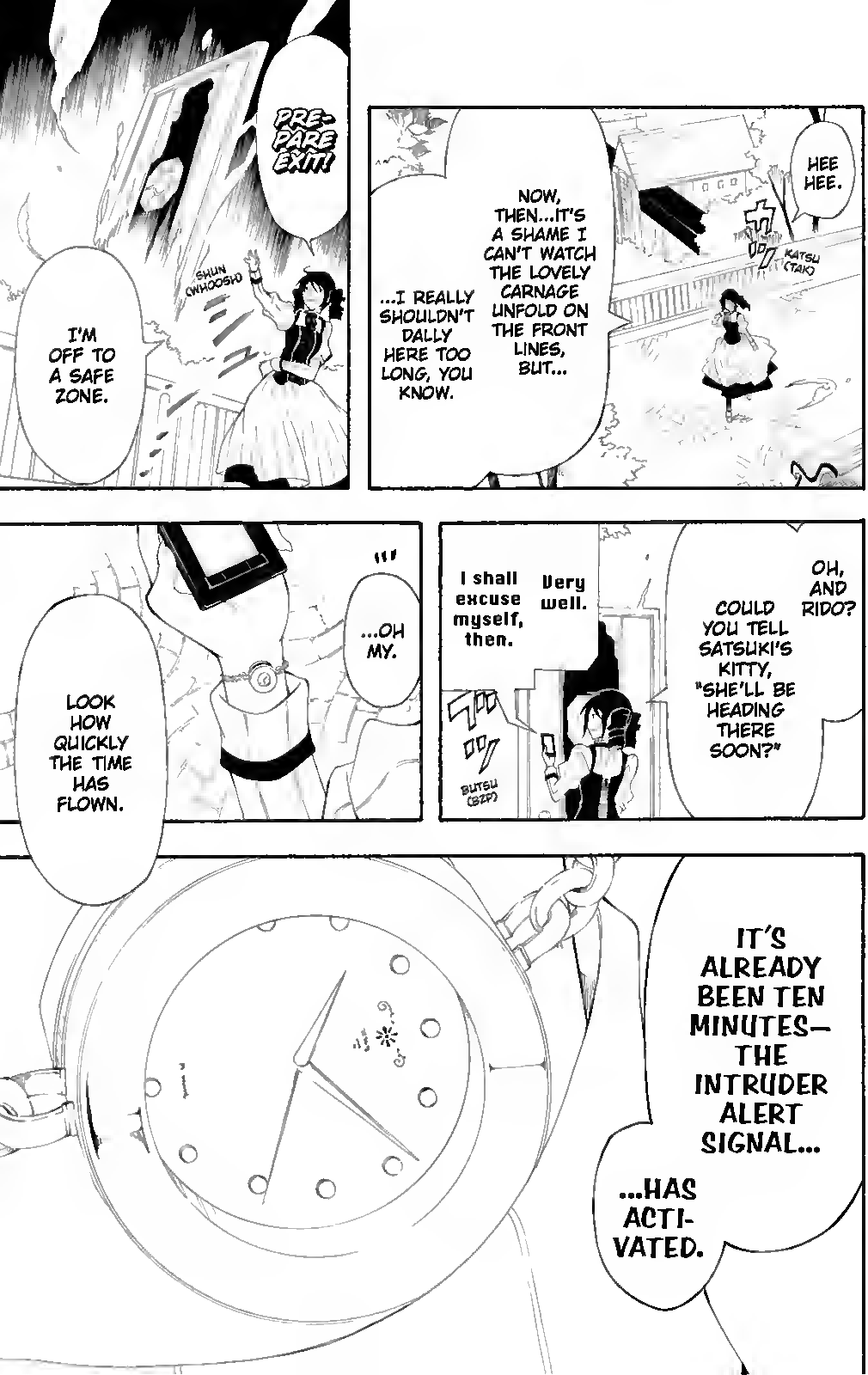

KOTSU (TOK)
HEE.
BESIDES, I'VE TAKEN EXTRA MEASURES TO DRIVE THEM AGAINST A WALL.


THAT MAP DEVICE I GAVE THEM...
...I MODIFIED IT TO EMIT AN INTRUDER ALERT SIGNAL...
...WITHIN KAMUHABURI.

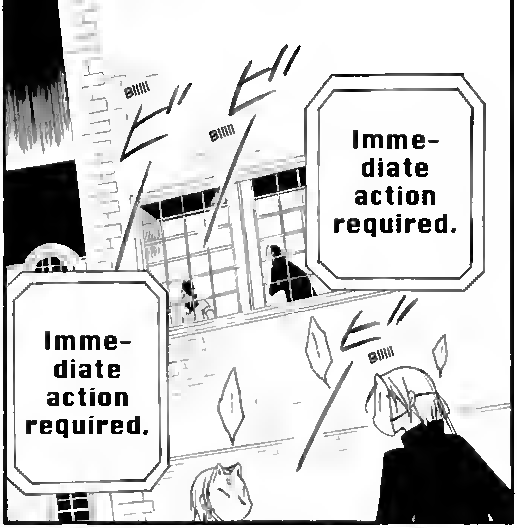
Whee!
WHEN THEY FIND THEMSELVES SURROUNDED, THEIR LENIENT NOTIONS OF ESCAPING WITHOUT BLOODSHED OUGHT TO CHANGE FAIRLY QUICKLY.
AFTER THAT GOES OFF, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO REACH ME OR GET OUT...
NOBI (STRETCH)
IT'S SET FOR TEN MINUTES POST-POWER-ON.

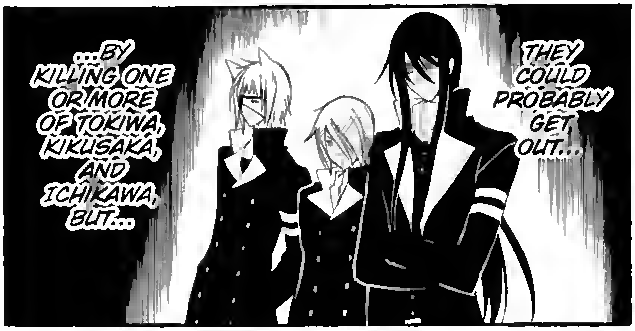
HE'S TO CALL MY AMANE WHEN HE ARRIVES AT THE PORTAL.
.....OH...
...AND IF HINATA CONTACTS ME, I'LL LET HIM IN TOO.

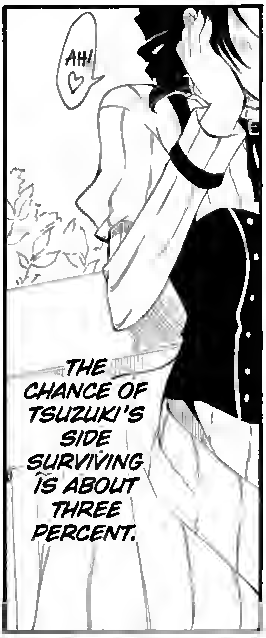

EASYGOING, IGNORANT HINATA WILL BE BRANDED A TRAITOR AND MAY EVEN FIND HIMSELF KILLED...
...by a mentally and physically exhausted Tsuzuki driven to the brink from battling Kamuhaburi.
YOU ARE A TERRIBLE PERSON.

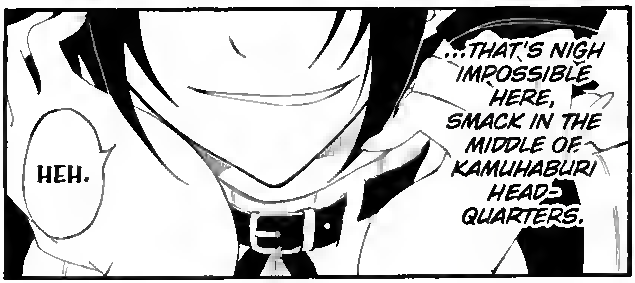

PRE-
PARE
EXIT!
SHUN (WHOOSH)
I'M OFF TO A SAFE ZONE.
HEE HEE.
KATSU (TAK)
NOW, THEN...IT'S A SHAME I CAN'T WATCH THE LOVELY CARNAGE UNFOLD ON THE FRONT LINES, BUT...
...I REALLY SHOULDN'T DALLY HERE TOO LONG, YOU KNOW.
OH, AND RIDO?
COULD YOU TELL SATSUKI'S KITTY, "SHE'LL BE HEADING THERE SOON?"
Very well.
I shall excuse myself, then.
BUTSU (SZP)
...OH MY.
LOOK HOW QUICKLY THE TIME HAS FLOWN.
IT'S ALREADY BEEN TEN MINUTES— THE INTRUDER ALERT SIGNAL...
...HAS ACTI-VATED.

Emergency alert!
Emergency alert!
WHAT THE ...!?
Intruder presence confirmed.
HEE HEE!









...IS USED TO INFLICT LASTING DAMAGE UPON THESE BASTARDS, LORD GOD CANDIDATE.

I HOPE YOUR LAST OUNCE OF STRENGTH IN THE WORLD...

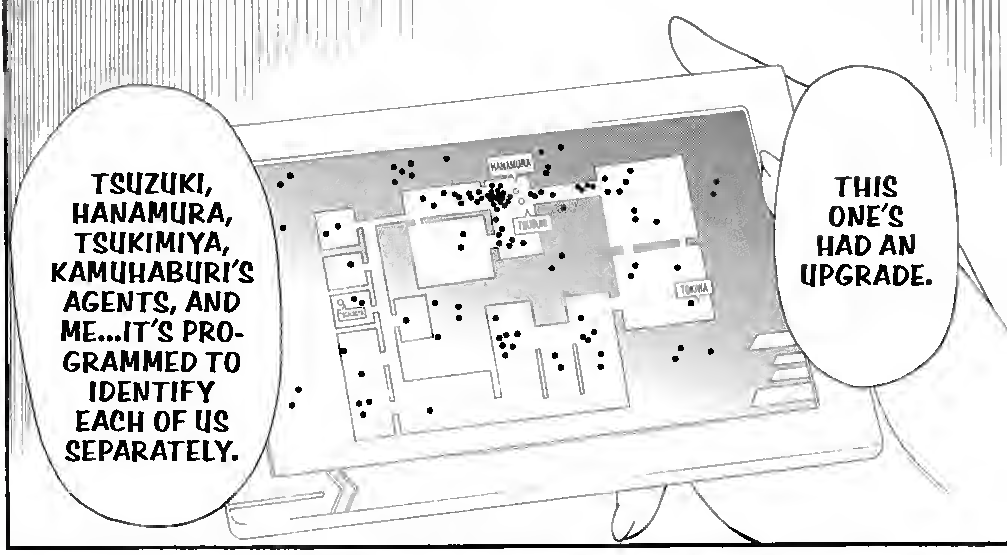
AH HA...
WELL, IN ANY CASE...
...SO THAT I MAY REMEMBER THIS GLORIOUS DAY FOREVER...
...SO STIMULATED RIGHT NOW, I THINK I MIGHT PASS OUT!
AH... I'M...
AHH!
ZOKU
ZOKU (SHIVER)

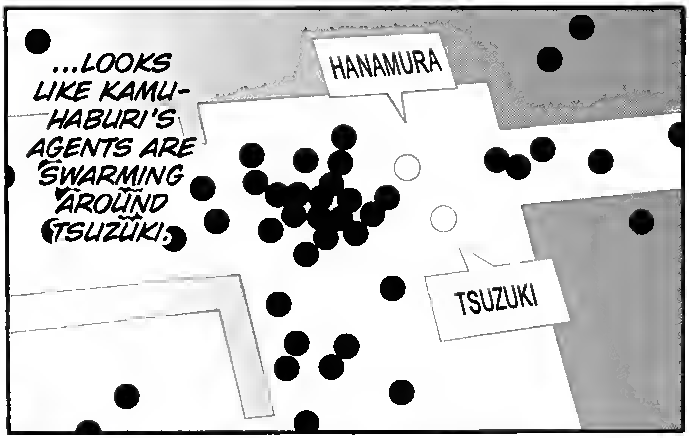
PASHARI (FLASH)
A COMMEM-ORATIVE PHOTO!

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 48
Judgment Time


TSUZUKI, HANAMURA, TSUKIMIYA, KAMUHABURI'S AGENTS, AND ME...IT'S PROGRAMMED TO IDENTIFY EACH OF US SEPARATELY.
THIS ONE'S HAD AN UPGRADE.
HANAMURA
TSUKIMIYA
TSUZUKI


...LOOKS LIKE KAMUHABURI'S AGENTS ARE SWARMING AROUND TSUZUKI.
HANAMURA
TSUZUKI

ONLY GIVING LOCATIONS FOR "BLACK SEAL BEARERS" IS SO USELESS.
AHH, THIS IS HELPFUL.
PI (BEEP)
PI

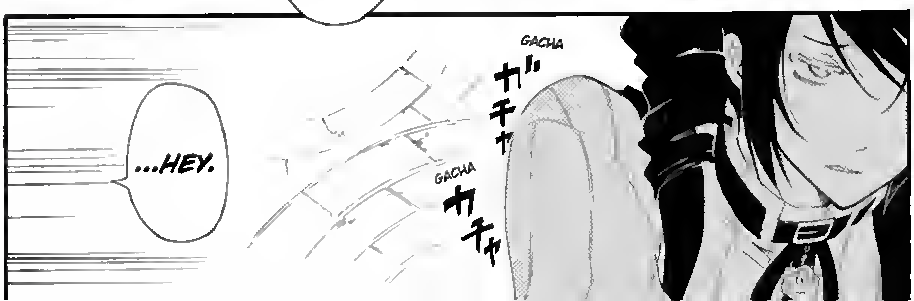
THE BLOODBATH BETWEEN ANGEL AND KAMUHABURI...
MEANING... IT MAY ALREADY BE UNDER WAY...
STIMULATING! ♡

ARCANA'S ABSENCE IS REGRETTABLE, BUT...
...TSUZUKI'S DEATH SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO SATISFY SATSUKI.
TON (HOP)
NOW...
...I'VE SET UP THE SLAUGHTER...
KOTSU (TOK)
...IT'S TIME TO ESCAPE BEFORE THEY FIND ME.
IF I TAKE THIS KEY WITH ME...
...TSUZUKI AND HANAMURA WILL BE TRAPPED IN THIS DIMENSION.
MY FAVORITE SHOW IS ABOUT TO UNFOLD!
KACHARI (CLICK)

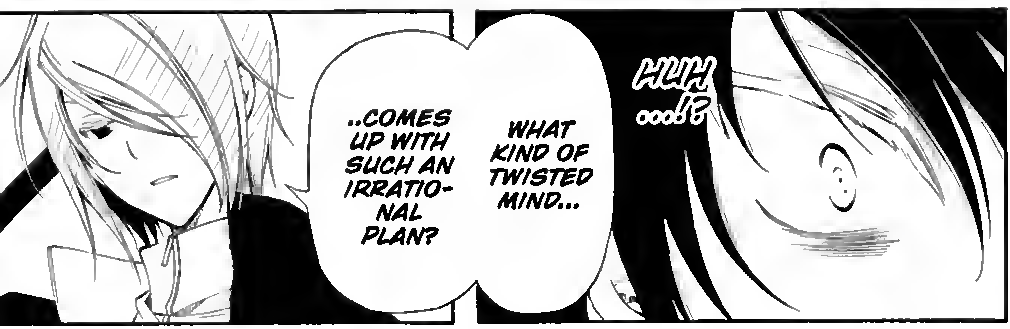
HM?
"KLIK"?
GAKI (KLIK)
壱
陸
伍
肆

GACHA
GACHA (RATTLE)
GACHA
IS THE LOCK RUSTED? THAT CAN'T BE...
IT OPENED EASILY COMING IN...

HUH?
IT WON'T UNLOCK ...


...HEY.
GACHA
GACHA

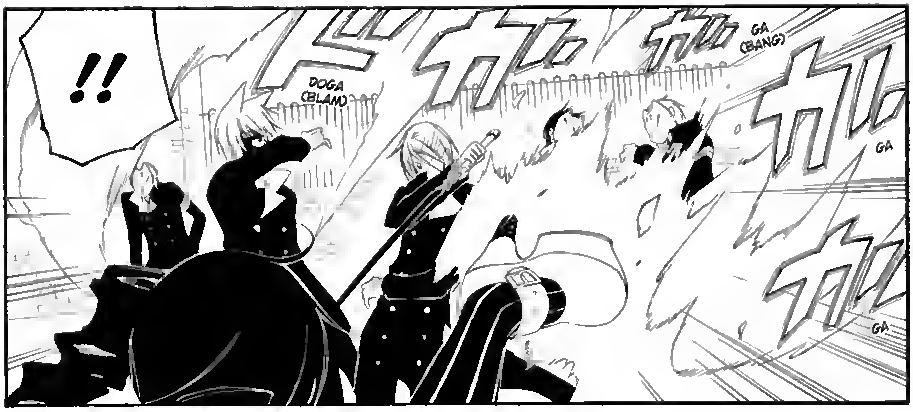
CAN I ASK YOU SOME-THING?


HUH ....!?
WHAT KIND OF TWISTED MIND...
..COMES UP WITH SUCH AN IRRATIO-NAL PLAN?

KAMU-HA-BURI ...!!
BA (WHIRL)

TCH...I SHOULDN'T HAVE WAITED AROUND FOR THE ALERT.
...MY.
THIS IS A BOTHER-SOME BUNCH TO RUN INTO.
IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
KASHA (KASHINK)

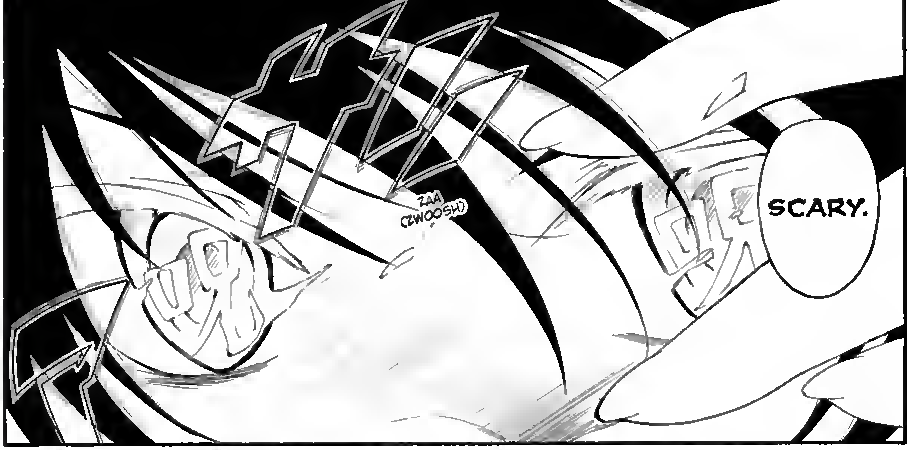
WHY WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO GO TO THE ONE PLACE YOU KNOW YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET KILLED?


!!
DOGA (BLAM)
GA (BANG)
GA
GA

...OH MY.
VUN (VWMM)

...I "FOLLOWED MY HEART" ...
...AND IT LED ME HERE.
I THINK I'LL RUN.
TA (TROT)
TO ANSWER YOUR QUES-TION...

CATCH HER, DEAD OR ALIVE.


ZAA CZWIOOSH
SCARY.

EYES' CURSE

HMPH.
STAY PUT FOR A WHILE, WOULD YOU?

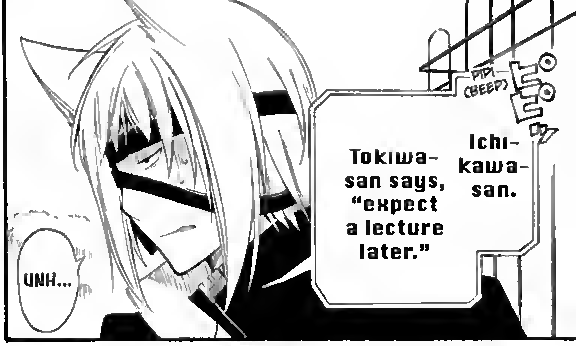
GGH ...!

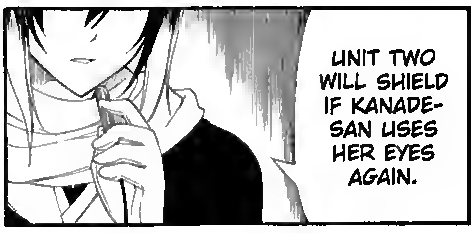
WHA ...!?
MY EYES...

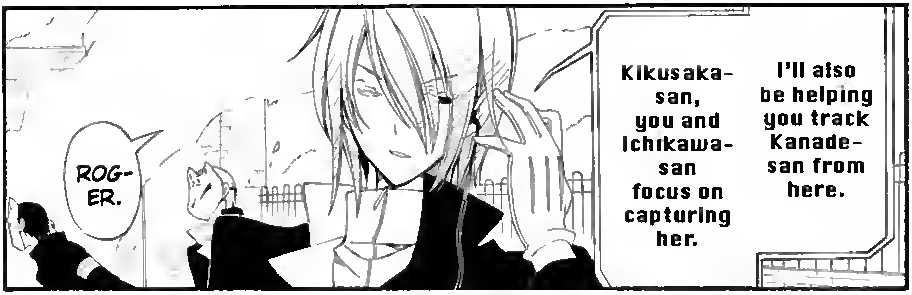
...
BEAST-IP?!

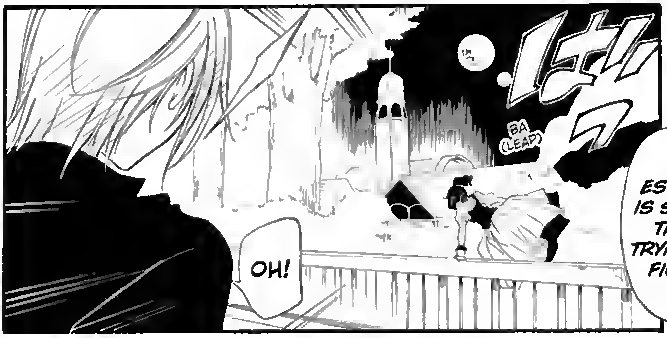
BYU CZWISHD
ACK!
DOGO CIIMASHD
...HAD NO EFFECT...!?

UNIT SIX, LEAVE THE SOUTH OF THE COMPLEX. PLEASE GO IMMEDIATELY TO RETRIEVE UNIT ONE. THEY'VE BEEN INCAPACI-TATED.

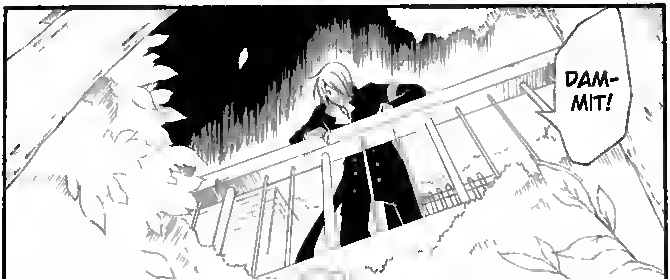

UNH...
Tokiwa-san says, "expect a lecture later."
Ichi-kawa-san.
PIPI (BEEP)

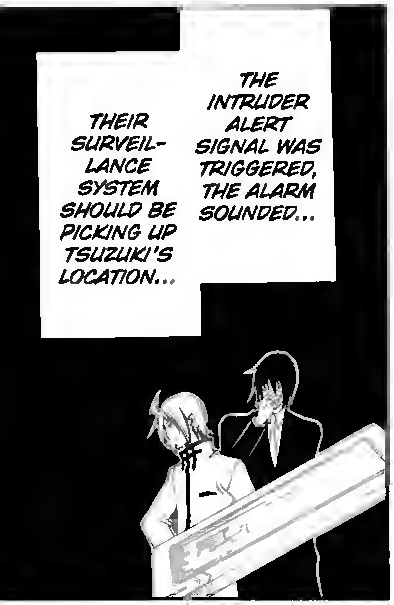

UNIT TWO WILL SHIELD IF KANADE-SAN USES HER EYES AGAIN.


ROG-ER.
Kikusaka-san, you and Ichikawa-san focus on capturing her.
I'll also be helping you track Kanade-san from here.


OH!
BA (LEAP)

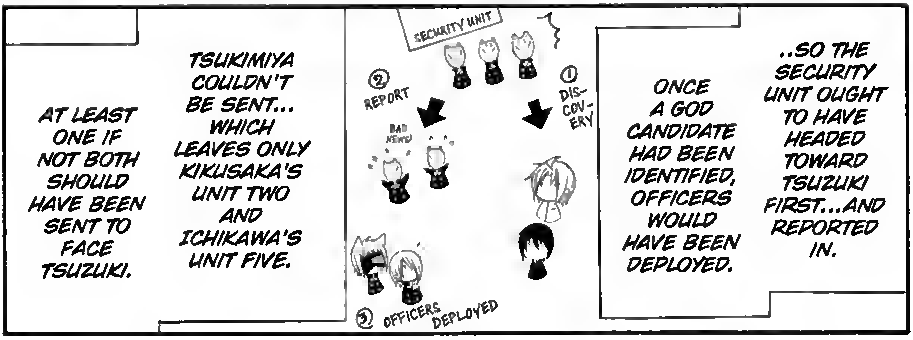
TCH.
I GUESS I CAN'T USE THE SAME TRICK TWICE... I SUPPOSE I REALLY SHOULDN'T BE SUR-PRISED.
ESCAPE IS SAFER THAN TRYING TO FIGHT.

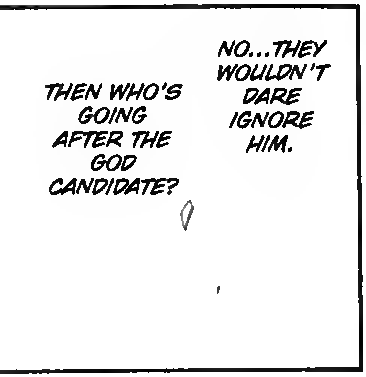

DAM-MIT!


THEIR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM SHOULD BE PICKING UP TSUZUKI'S LOCATION...
THE INTRUDER ALERT SIGNAL WAS TRIGGERED, THE ALARM SOUNDED...

ZAZA (RUSTLE)

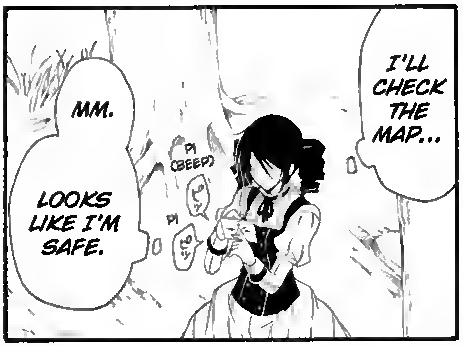
WHAT COULD BE GOING ON?
...SOMETHING'S OFF.

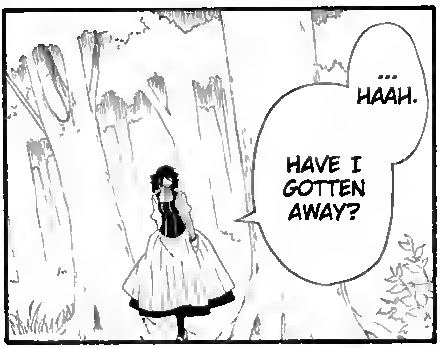

AT LEAST ONE IF NOT BOTH SHOULD HAVE BEEN SENT TO FACE TSUZUKI.
TSUKIMIYA COULDN'T BE SENT... WHICH LEAVES ONLY KIKUSAKA'S UNIT TWO AND ICHIKAWA'S UNIT FIVE.
SECURITY UNIT
② REPORT
BAD NEWS!
① DISCOVERY
③ OFFICERS DEPLOYED
ONCE A GOD CANDIDATE HAD BEEN IDENTIFIED, OFFICERS WOULD HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED.
..SO THE SECURITY UNIT OUGHT TO HAVE HEADED TOWARD TSUZUKI FIRST...AND REPORTED IN.


THEN WHO'S GOING AFTER THE GOD CANDIDATE?
NO...THEY WOULDN'T DARE IGNORE HIM.

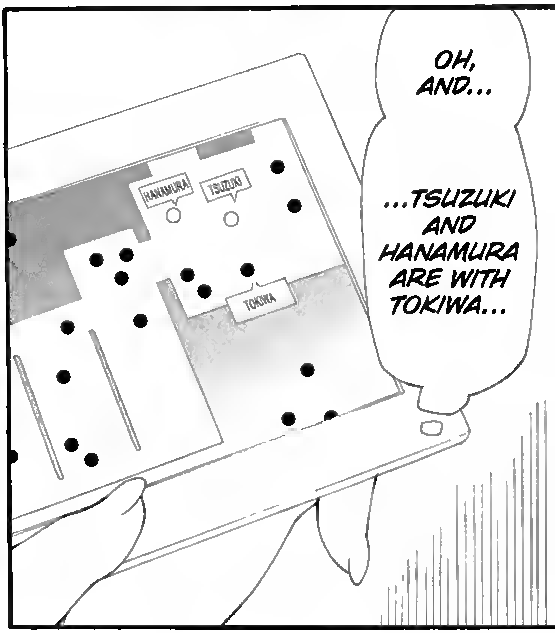
DOES THAT MEAN I WAS PRIORITIZED OVER TSUZUKI FOR SOME REASON?
BUT INSTEAD, THEY'RE BOTH CHASING ME RIGHT NOW...

...AND THE TWO OF THEM ARE CURRENTLY SQUARING OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER...MY CONDOLENCES.
...AHH, PERHAPS THE BLACK SEAL TSUZUKI WENT AFTER WAS TOKIWA...

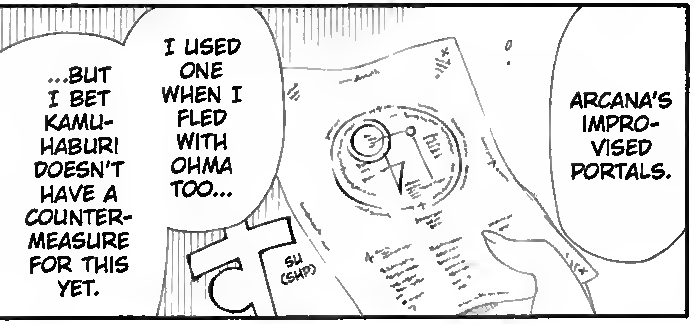

I'LL CHECK THE MAP...
(BEEP)
MM.
LOOKS LIKE I'M SAFE.


...HAAH.
HAVE I GOTTEN AWAY?

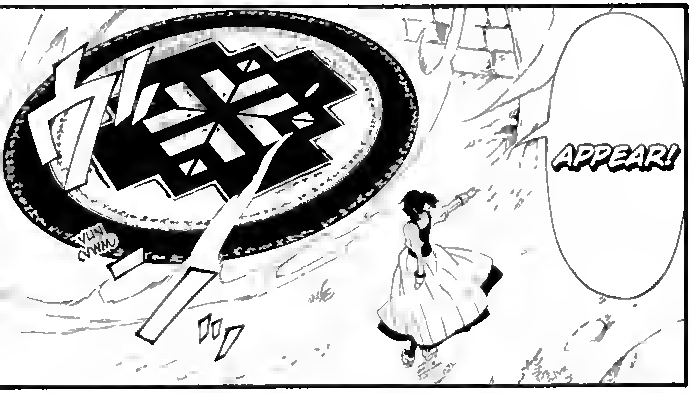
.....GOOD, I'VE STILL GOT THE UPPER HAND.
WELL, I'D BETTER STOP DILLY-DALLYING ...
...AND GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE KAMUHABURI LOCATES ME AGAIN.


OH, AND...
...TSUZUKI AND HANAMURA ARE WITH TOKIWA...
HANAMURA
TSUZUKI
TOKIWA

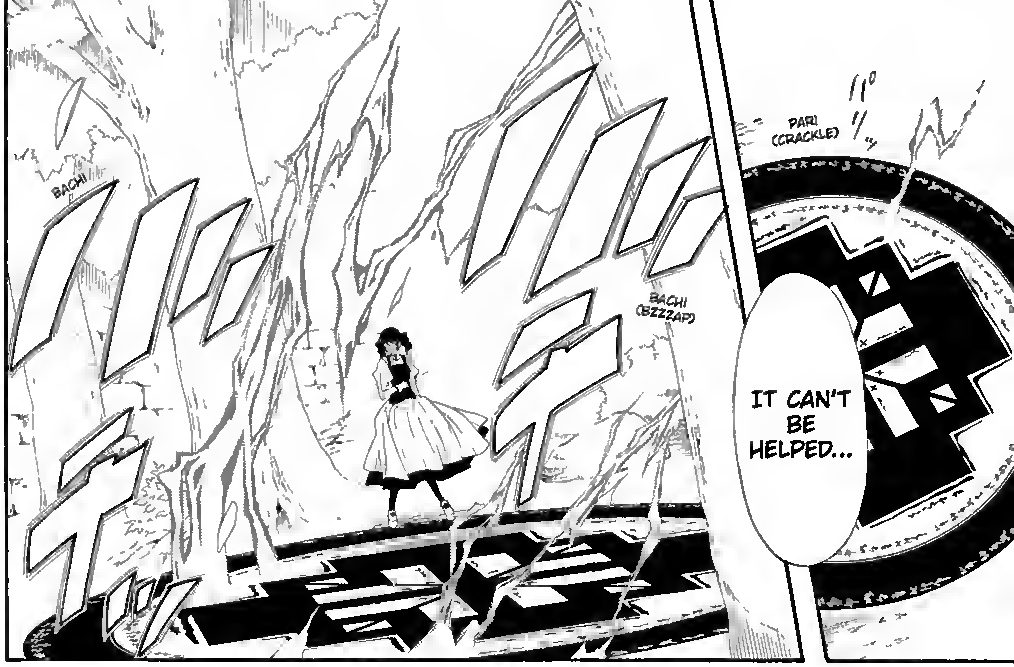
...SINCE I WAS FOUND AT ONE OF THOSE, THE FIRST THING THEY'LL DO IS POST TROOPS AT ALL OF THEM.
THE PROBLEM NOW IS HOW TO ESCAPE... THERE ARE A TOTAL OF SIX SITES WHERE ONE CAN SUMMON A PORTAL, BUT...


...BUT I BET KAMU-HABURI DOESN'T HAVE A COUNTER-MEASURE FOR THIS YET.
I USED ONE WHEN I FLED WITH OHMA TOO...
ARCANA'S IMPRO-VISED PORTALS.

I'M SO GLAD I PINCHED THESE FROM MAKINO.
IN WHICH CASE... I'LL HAVE TO USE A DIFFER-ENT EXIT STRAT-EGY.
GOSO (RUMMAGE)
GOSO


APPEAR!

THAT WOULD'VE BEEN MORE STIMULAT-ING.
WELL...
...I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO HUMILIATE KAMUHABURI BY STROLLING OUT ONE OF THE MAIN EXITS.


BACHI
BACHI (BZZZAP)
PARI (CRACKLE)
IT CAN'T BE HELPED...

GEEZ ...!
GASHAN (KRASH)
... HUH!?
BACHI
AGAIN!?
WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING—

...SHH.

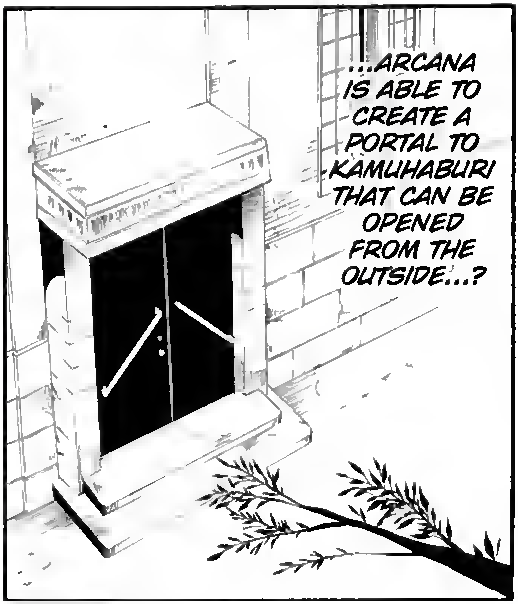
C'MON
DON'T SHOUT, OR THE ENEMY'LL FIND YOU!
!!
YOU ...!

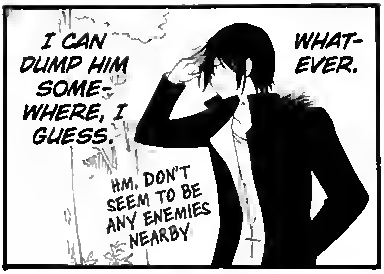
SO, WHAT? HANAMURA AND TSUZUKI ARE ALREADY INSIDE LOOKING FOR TSUKIMIYA?
.....!

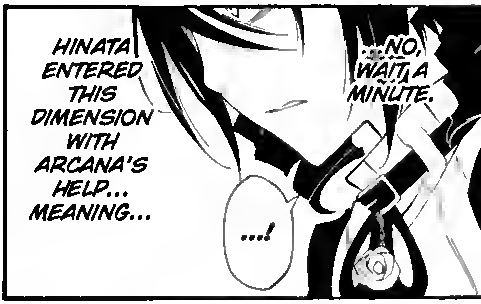
AND YOU WERE ASSIGNED TO DO... WHAT NOW?
OF ALL THINGS...
GIRI CCLENCH

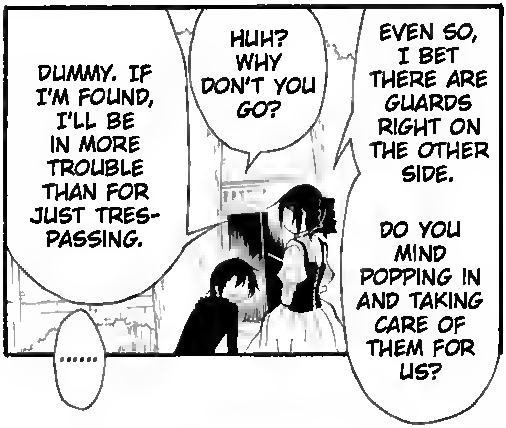
I FINALLY FINISHED MY RESEARCH...
...AND GOT ARCANA TO MAKE ME A WAY IN HERE.
...!
ANYWAY, SORRY I'M LATE.

...FOR HIM TO ARRIVE NOW..... SUCH A NUISANCE!
...BUT COULD YOU TAKE ME TO THEM?
I FEEL BAD INTER-RUPT-ING...


...ARCANA IS ABLE TO CREATE A PORTAL TO KAMUHABURI THAT CAN BE OPENED FROM THE OUTSIDE...?


I CAN DUMP HIM SOME-WHERE, I GUESS.
WHAT-EVER.
HM, DON'T SEEM TO BE ANY ENEMIES NEARBY

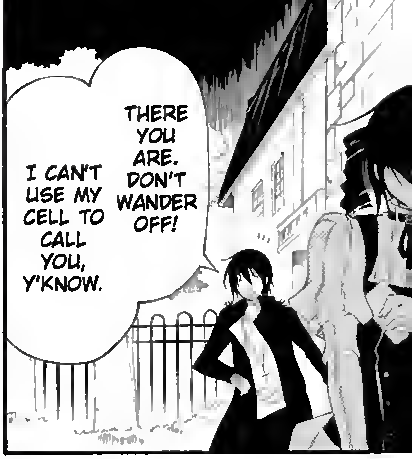

HINATA ENTERED THIS DIMENSION WITH ARCANA'S HELP... MEANING...
...NO, WAIT A MINUTE.
...!

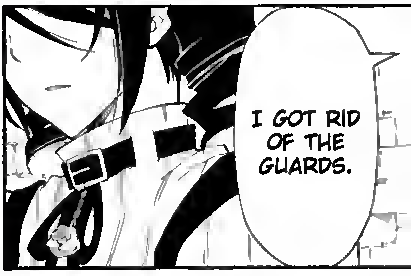

DUMMY. IF I'M FOUND, I'LL BE IN MORE TROUBLE THAN FOR JUST TRES-PASSING.
HUH? WHY DON'T YOU GO?
EVEN SO, I BET THERE ARE GUARDS RIGHT ON THE OTHER SIDE.
DO YOU MIND POPPING IN AND TAKING CARE OF THEM FOR US?
.....

I'VE HAD MY EYE ON THIS ENTRY SINCE THAT ALARM SEEMS TO HAVE THINNED THEIR COVERAGE.
GOOD, THERE ARE NO LOOK-OUTS.

KATSU
CTAK
...YEESH, ALL RIGHT, FINE.
.....
WHAT A PAIN
MAKINO IS ARCANA'S LIAISON BETWEEN THEM AND TSUZUKI'S SIDE, RIGHT?
KATSU
KATSU
COULD YOU REOPEN THE PORTAL YOU JUST PREPARED FOR HINATA?
HELLO, MAKINO-SAN?
... Yes?
TO THE FOLLOW-ING COOR-DINATES, RIGHT AWA—
Huh... Hinata? What do you mean?
Look, I know you said it's urgent, but...
...I'm in the middle of a meeting.
...HUH?

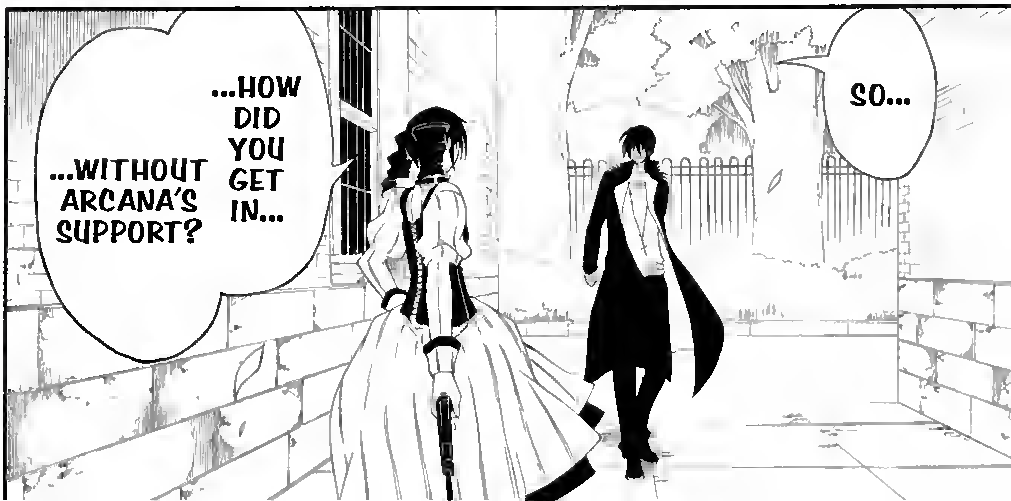
DON
(BLAM)


THERE YOU ARE. DON'T WANDER OFF!
I CAN'T USE MY CELL TO CALL YOU, Y'KNOW.

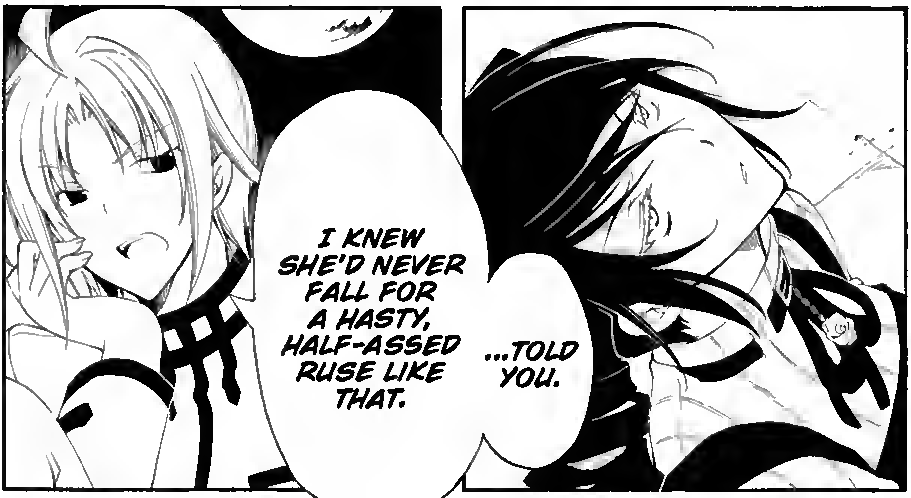

I GOT RID OF THE GUARDS.

MAKINO-SAN SAYS HE DIDN'T HELP YOU GET INTO KAMUHABURI.

THERE ARE TOO MANY THINGS THAT DON'T ADD UP.
MM... CARE TO EXPLAIN SOME-THING TO ME?
WHA ...?


...WITHOUT ARCANA'S SUPPORT?
...HOW DID YOU GET IN...
SO...

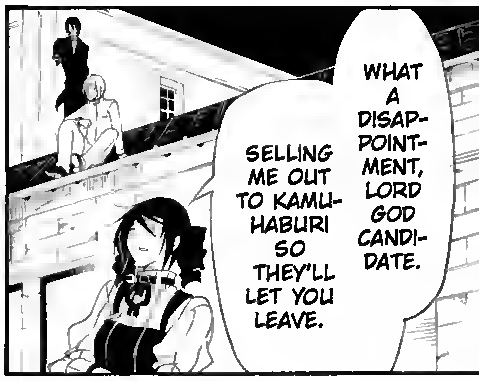
ジャキ
JAKI
(KA-CHIK)


I KNEW SHE'D NEVER FALL FOR A HASTY, HALF-ASSED RUSE LIKE THAT.
...TOLD YOU.

!
...I SEE.
WE'LL BE IN TROUBLE IF OUR DEAL WITH KAMU-HABURI FALLS THROUGH.

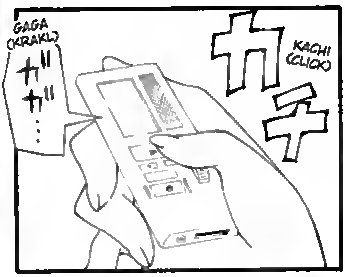
RESTRAIN HER, WILL YOU?
AWW...
I'D HOPED I'D GET TO STRING HER ALONG A LITTLE FIRST.

BUT ARE YOU SURE THIS IS WISE?
AFTER ALL... ARCANA MAY SEE THIS AS AN ACT OF BETRAYAL. THAT'S NOT THE SORT OF MESSAGE YOU WANT TO SEND TO AN ALLY, IS IT?


WHAT A DISAP-POINT-MENT, LORD GOD CANDI-DATE.
SELLING ME OUT TO KAMU-HABURI SO THEY'LL LET YOU LEAVE.

After to-night's Cru-sade...
...if Nao does his part, Satsuki intends to invite him to his place.

BE-TRAY-AL... HUH.
WELL ...
...I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE SEEN AS SUCH.

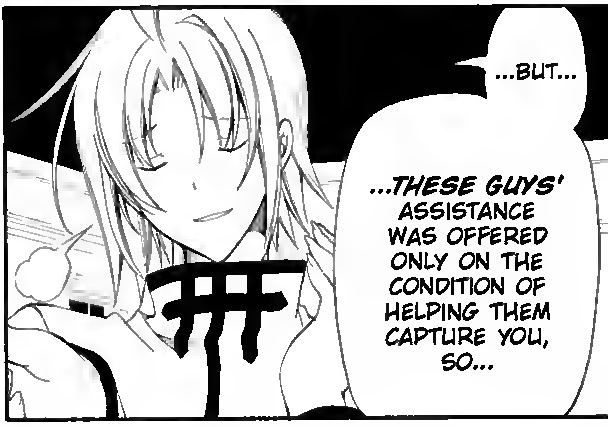

GAGA (KRAK!)
KACHI (CLICK)

Me too.
I've already taken measures to keep Arcana out of the way.
Indeed...? Then I'll make sure Tsukimiya is primed to step in and stall them.
WHA...!?

PI (BEEP)
PI
OH, AND ONE MORE.
.....Aren't you planning to bump off Tsuzuki at some point anyway?
After all, the God Candidate would be in the way... of you becoming God...
...right, Izumi-san?
...WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT "BETRAYAL" AGAIN?
WELL, KANADE-SAN? I ASK THE ALLY OF SATSUKI WHO'S BEEN COZYING UP TO ARCANA ALL WHILE FEIGNING LOYALTY TO ME.
THAT'S...THE CONVERSATION I HAD WITH RIDO BEFORE THE CRUSADE...!
BA (WHIRL)
YOU WERE EXTORTING HIM, WEREN'T YOU?
THE FILE WAS NAMED "CHARM AGAINST EVIL."
I FOUND IT WHEN I WAS RUMMAGING THROUGH NAO'S ROOM.
THIS RECORDING.
.....!

I DON'T REALLY WANT TO SEVER MY ALLIANCE WITH ARCANA...
SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.
.....

"THESE GUYS" ...?


...BUT...
...THESE GUYS' ASSISTANCE WAS OFFERED ONLY ON THE CONDITION OF HELPING THEM CAPTURE YOU, SO...

TAA (SKFF)
...YUP.

THANKS TO YOU AND RIDO...
...KAMU-HABURI'S AND MY INTERESTS HAVE PRO-PITIOUSLY CON-VERGED...
...AND WE'VE DECIDED TO BECOME FRIENDS STARTING TODAY.
THANKS FOR THAT.
...GH!!

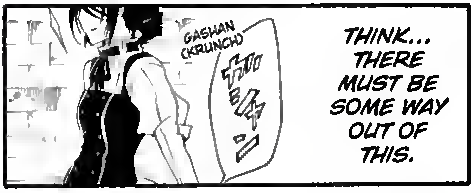
THIS IS THE WORST...
WE'VE SENT PEOPLE AFTER RIDO TOO.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE WE HAVE HIM.

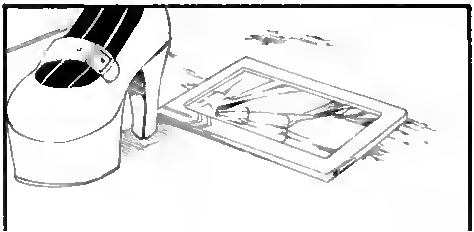
JUST SO YOU KNOW, WE'VE SEALED ALL EXITS.
THIS DIMENSION HAS BEEN SET ADRIFT, YOU MIGHT SAY.
THERE'S NO GETTING OUT.

KA-NADE.
YOU ARE TO BE EXECUTED AT ONCE.

...BUT YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO REVERSE TSUKIMIYA'S BRAIN-WASHING WITHOUT RIDO.
HIS LAB AND DATA ARE HERE AT KAMUHABURI. IT SHOULDN'T BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR SOME-ONE TO UNRAVEL IT.

... GEEZ. WHEN DID YOU EVEN HAVE TIME TO NEGOTI— OH.
COULD IT HAVE BEEN ON THE CAR RIDE HERE?
THAT'S THE ONLY TIME YOU WERE OUT OF MY SIGHT.


THINK... THERE MUST BE SOME WAY OUT OF THIS.
GASHAN CKRUNCH!



.....
...DON'T STOP THINK-ING.
IT'S NOT OVER YET.

KIMIYA
KAGAMI
TSUKIMI
HAMAMURA
TSUYUMIYA
.....!
TSU-
KI-
MIYA
...!!

...ESCAPE MIGHT JUST BE POSSIBLE ...!
IF I TAKE HER HOSTAGE...
AHH... IN-CREDI-BLE...
THIS CRAZY LUCK OF MINE IS FEARSOME.
SHEESH...
IT APPEARS THE UPPER HAND...IS STILL MINE.
MY CONDOLENCES, ALL.

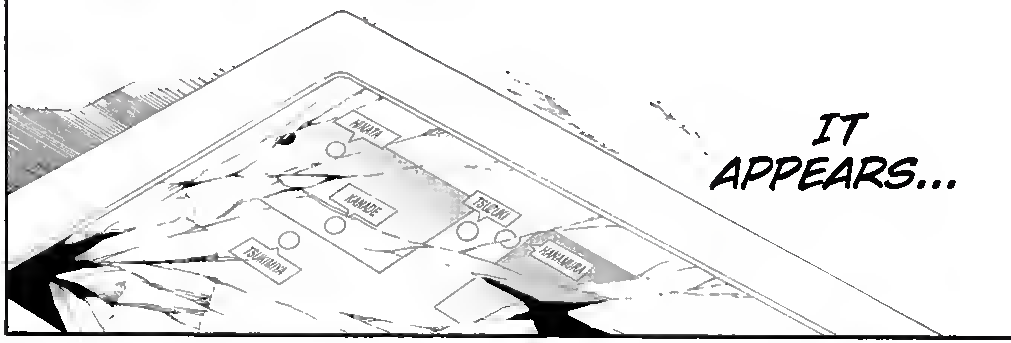
BLOODY CROSS

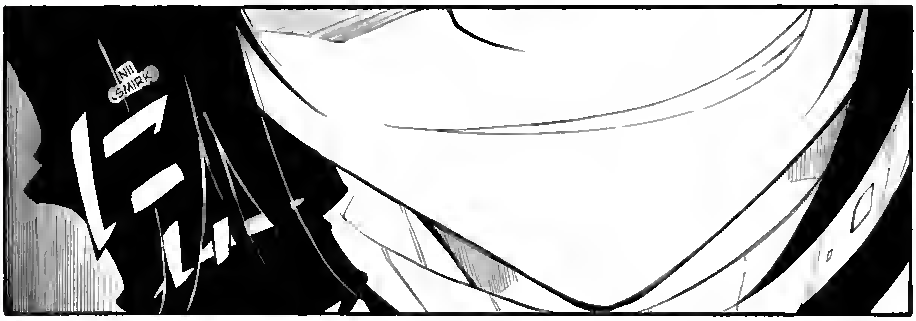
BLOODY CROSS

KA-
NADE.
Chapter 49
Cordon

YOU SHALL BE EXECUTED AT ONCE.
.....

NO, NOT YET...
JIRI (SKRSH)


IT APPEARS...



...THE UPPER HAND IS STILL MINE...!!

OH!
BA (LEAP)
IF I TAKE TSUKIMIYA...
IF I HOLD THE BEARER OF A BLACK SEAL HOSTAGE...
KATSU CTAIO
...ESCAPE MIGHT JUST BE POSSIBLE!!

STOP, KANADE.

RETURNING HER SAFELY IS A CONDITION OF OUR ALLIANCE WITH THE LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
I CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO TAKE HER.
KOTSU (TOK)
TOKI-WA...!
BA (WHIRL)
"I COULDN'T SEE THAT HE WAS IN HERE..."
...BECAUSE THE MAP'S SCREEN WAS BROKEN... DAMMIT!
TRYING TO FIGHT HIM COULD ONLY RESULT IN MY DEFEAT.
NO... CALM DOWN AND THINK.
GACHA (KA-CLICK)

WAKE UP, TSUKIMIYA.
RIDO PROGRAMMED THIS CHILD TO OBEY MY COMMANDS AS WELL.
I'LL USE HER TO FIGHT... NO, AS A SHIELD.
UNH...
GAKU (SHAKE)
GAKU
IT'S USELESS.
HER BODY IS WORKING TO UNDO RIDO'S BRAINWASHING...
HER BRAIN HAS LAPSED INTO A DEEP SLEEP TO HEAL FROM THE AFTEREFFECTS.
!
GIVE IT UP.
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
HUH?
...THERE'S NO OTHER WAY.
I'VE DREAMED OF THIS DAY SO MANY TIMES.
EYES STOP
THE DAY...
...WHEN I WOULD FINALLY GET TO BLOW AWAY THAT FACE OF YOURS IN THE MOST HUMILIATING WAY...
GUWA (WHOOSH)
A FITTING REPAYMENT FOR PLAYING AT GOD BY FOOLISHLY SAVING ME THAT DAY...

THOSE EYES DON'T WORK ON ME.
HYU (SWISH)
STRIKE!!
...AND...
...FORCING ME TO LIVE THIS CRAMPED, CONSTRAINED LIFE!
DO (BLAM)
KH...!
GA (GRAB)
...KANADE.
DON'T MAKE ME REGRET BRINGING YOU INTO KAMUHABURI...

ZASHU (SLASH)
THINGS JUST WON'T GO MY WAY, EH.
DAMN...
SUCH A DREARY, BORING LIFE...
...ANY MORE ...
...THAN I ALREADY DO.
...NEVER SHOULD'VE TAKEN HIS HAND.....
I...

HAAH ...
UNH ...
GUGU (STRAIN)
SHIT! YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ...
IT'S... NO USE.
MY LEGS AND INSIDES... ARE PULP.
AHH...GOD IS SO USELESS. WHY COULDN'T I JUST HAVE DIED INSTANTLY?
... C'MON ...
I... JUST...
...FINISH... ME...OFF...
SAKU (SHP)
...AL- READY...

YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.

...YOU'LL PROBABLY BE DEAD IN A FEW MINUTES.
BUT...
...HUH ...?
すぅ
(SU)
(SIT)

...MEANS YOU HAVE THE MAKINGS TO SERVE GOD AS KAMUHABURI.
THAT I WAS DRAWN HERE TO YOU...
...IF... ...YOU CAN STILL UNDER-STAND, THEN LISTEN.

IS HE... CRAZY?
BOSO (MUMBLE)
"!"
PRESENT MIND

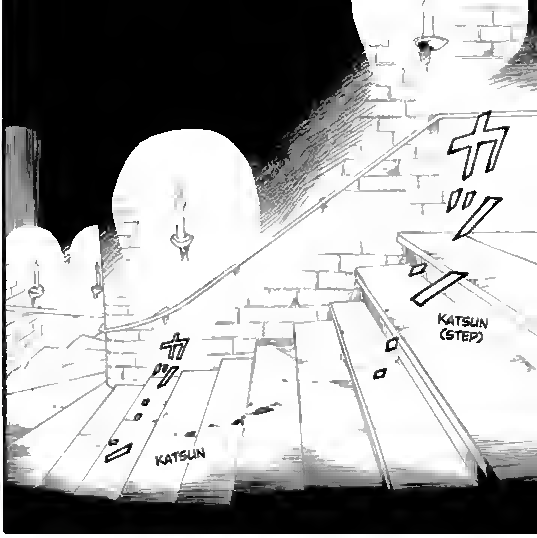
SOME ROOKIE EVANGE-LIST?
..... WH...AT...?

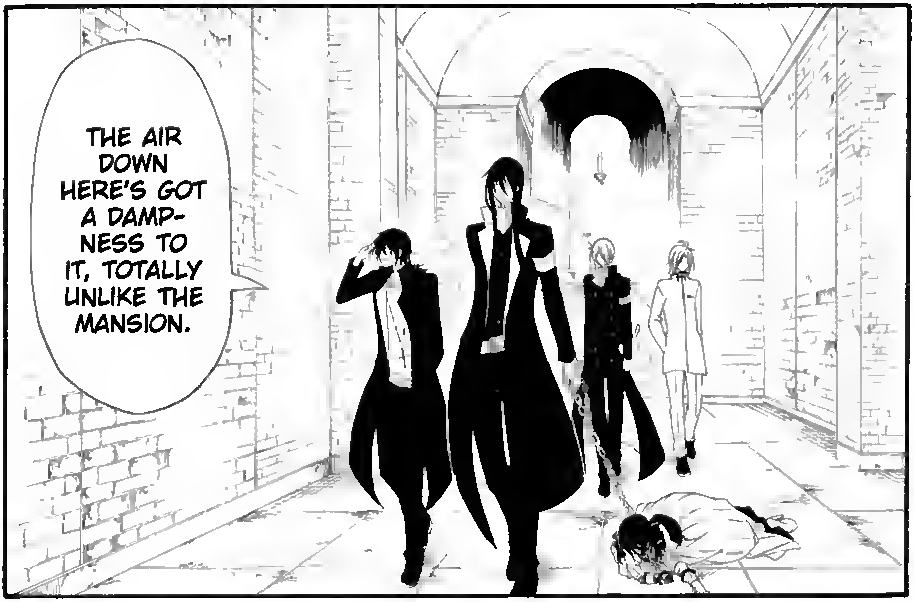
DO (BOOM)
IF YOU...
...ARE ATTACHED ONLY TO YOUR PRESENT LIFE...
...I AM ABLE TO GRANT YOU ANOTHER CHANCE TO LIVE.
.....!
IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR REMOVAL FROM THE CYCLE OF LIFE AND DEATH...
...AND THUS THE LOSS OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE REBORN...
(GASP)
...I CAN GRANT YOU A SECOND LIFE AS AN AGENT OF GOD.
THOUGH YOU WILL NOT BE FREE.

IF THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, TAKE MY HAND.
...IS HE STUPID?
"IF THAT IS ACCEPTABLE," HE SAYS...
PASHI (CLASP)
WHAT DYING PERSON WOULD TURN DOWN...
...SUCH A PERSUASIVE OFFER?
THE POWER OF YOUR EYES IS A SIDE EFFECT OF BEING REVIVED WITH DIVINE POWER.
IN RARE CASES THE REVIVAL CAUSES SOME LIKE YOU TO DEVELOP MAGICAL ABILITIES
AH..
...RECEIVING SUCH WONDROUS POWER ON TOP OF A NEW LIFE...I'M HAPPY.

AND...
...I'VE BECOME BORED WITH THE MONOTONOUS DAILY ROUTINE.
CONGRATS ON YOUR PROMOTION, KANADE.
ZZZ
YOU'RE CREATING A SIXTH UNIT?
THESE UNBEARABLY-AVERAGE FOOLS...
NIKO (GRIND)
BUT THIS SORT OF TEAM CAMARADERIE DOESN'T SUIT ME.
HAAH.
I WISH I COULD HAVE A NORMAL LIFE AGAIN.
CAN'T MORE THRILLS COME MY WAY...?
.....WELL, THEN...
AHA...

ZURI (DRAG)
ZURI

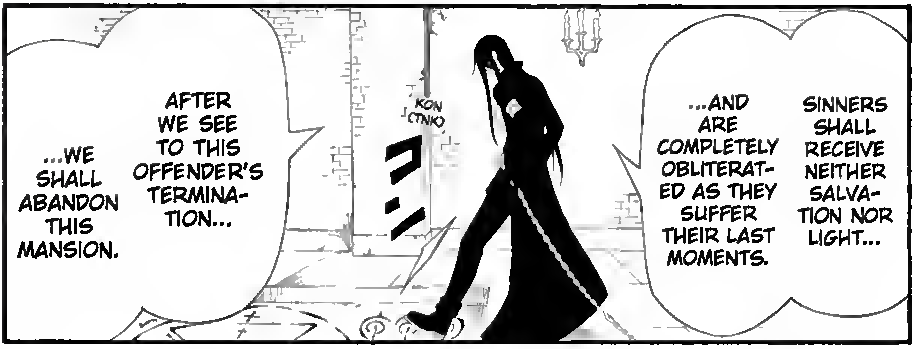

KATSUN (STEP)
KATSUN


THE AIR DOWN HERE'S GOT A DAMP-NESS TO IT, TOTALLY UNLIKE THE MANSION.

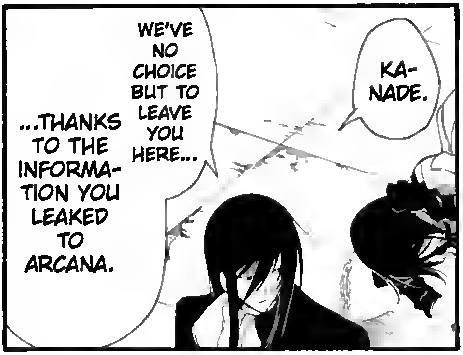
LIKE A DUN-GEON?
OR TOR-TURE ROOMS ?
NOT QUITE EITHER, ACTUAL-LY.

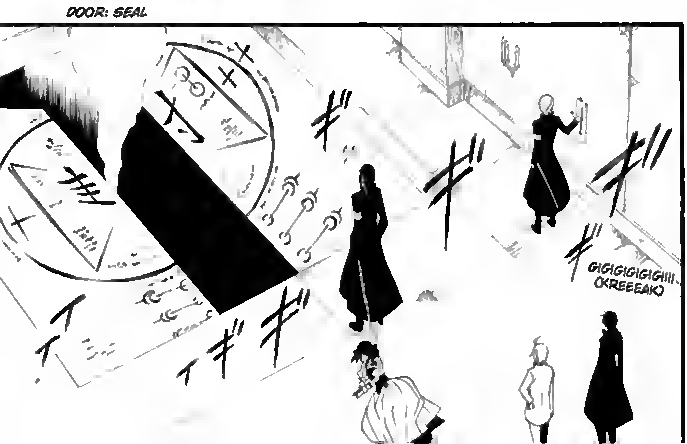
THIS BOTTOMMOST LEVEL HAS ROOMS FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF PUNISHING OFFENDERS.
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO WITH HER?

THIS ISN'T A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE JUST LOCKED UP FOR A TIME.
NOR ARE THEY TORTURED INTO REVEALING THEIR SECRETS.
ONCE PLACED INSIDE, THEIR BODIES AND SOULS ARE DEVOURED INTO NOTHINGNESS.
...THEY'RE EXECUTION ROOMS.

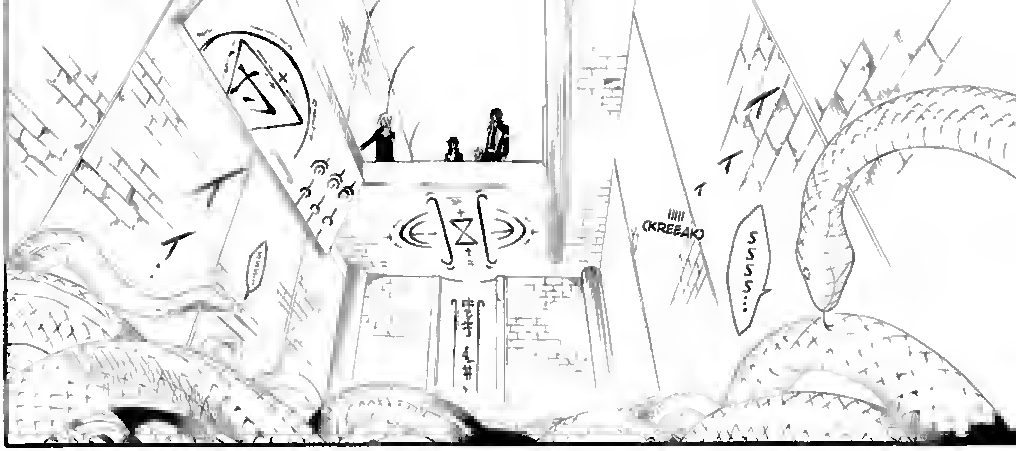

SINNERS SHALL RECEIVE NEITHER SALVATION NOR LIGHT...
...AND ARE COMPLETELY OBLITERATED AS THEY SUFFER THEIR LAST MOMENTS.
KON (TNK)
AFTER WE SEE TO THIS OFFENDER'S TERMINATION...
...WE SHALL ABANDON THIS MANSION.

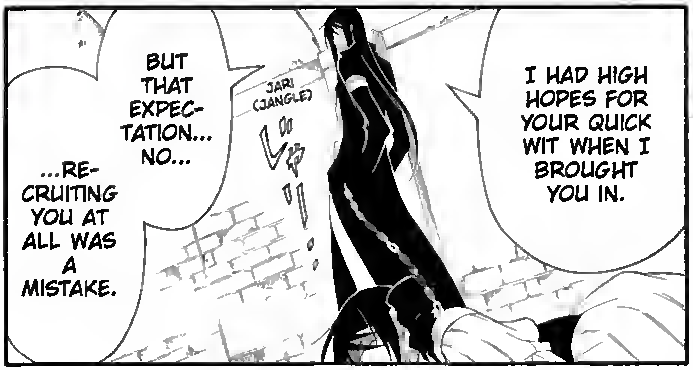
UNH...
I'M PLEASED YOU FELL FOR IT.
WE KEPT IT JUST LONG ENOUGH... TO USE IT AS A TRAP TO ENSNARE YOU.


KA-NADE.
WE'VE NO CHOICE BUT TO LEAVE YOU HERE...
...THANKS TO THE INFORMATION YOU LEAKED TO ARCANA.


DOOR: SEAL
GIGIGIGIGIGIII (KREEEAK)

GASHAN (CLANG)


(KREEAK)
SSSS...

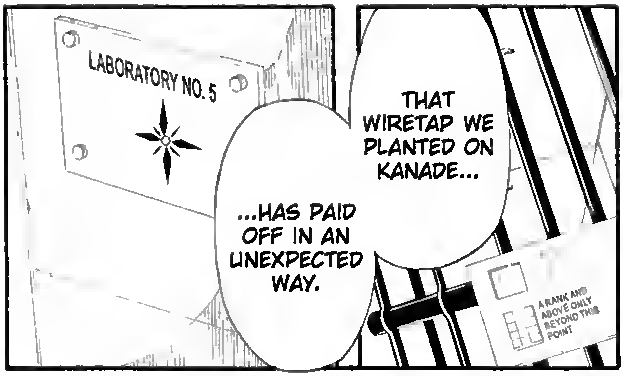

I HAD HIGH HOPES FOR YOUR QUICK WIT WHEN I BROUGHT YOU IN.
JARI (JANGLE)
BUT THAT EXPECTATION... NO...
...RECRUITING YOU AT ALL WAS A MISTAKE.

!
HRK...

DO (SHOVE)

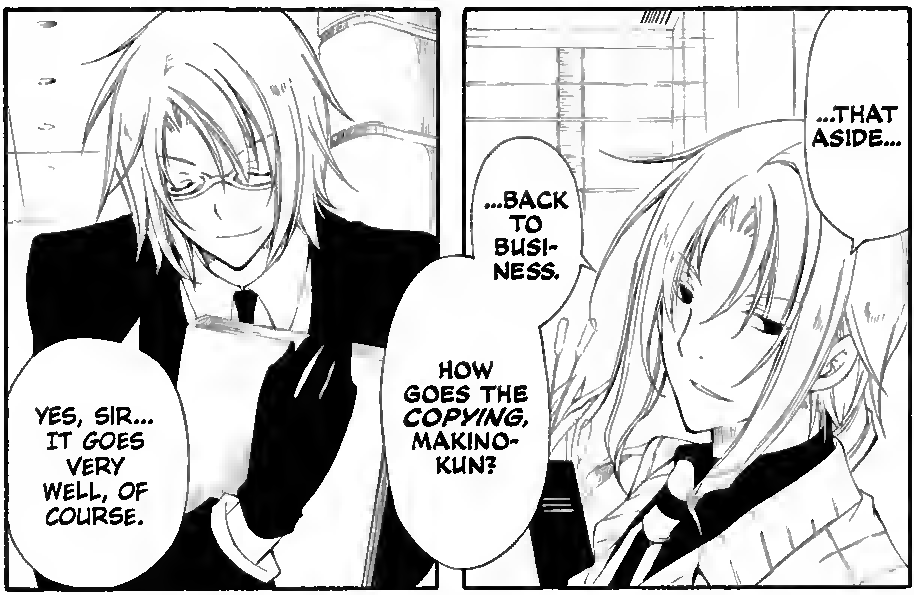
YOUR SERVICES ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED.
EE!
UZO (SLITHER)
UZO
WHAT ...!?
DOPU (SHLUP)
!
DOSHA (WHUMP)
UZO
UZO
KIKU-SAKA.
BEGIN PREPARA-TIONS TO SEAL THIS DIMEN-SION.

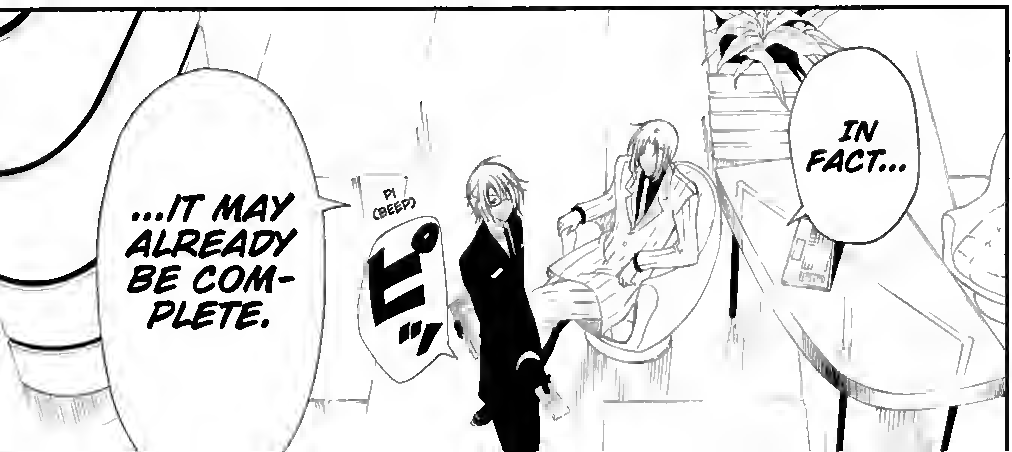
LET KAMU-HABURI'S EVACUATION FROM AND ANNIHILATION OF THIS DIMENSION...
KATSU CTAK!
...COM-MENCE.

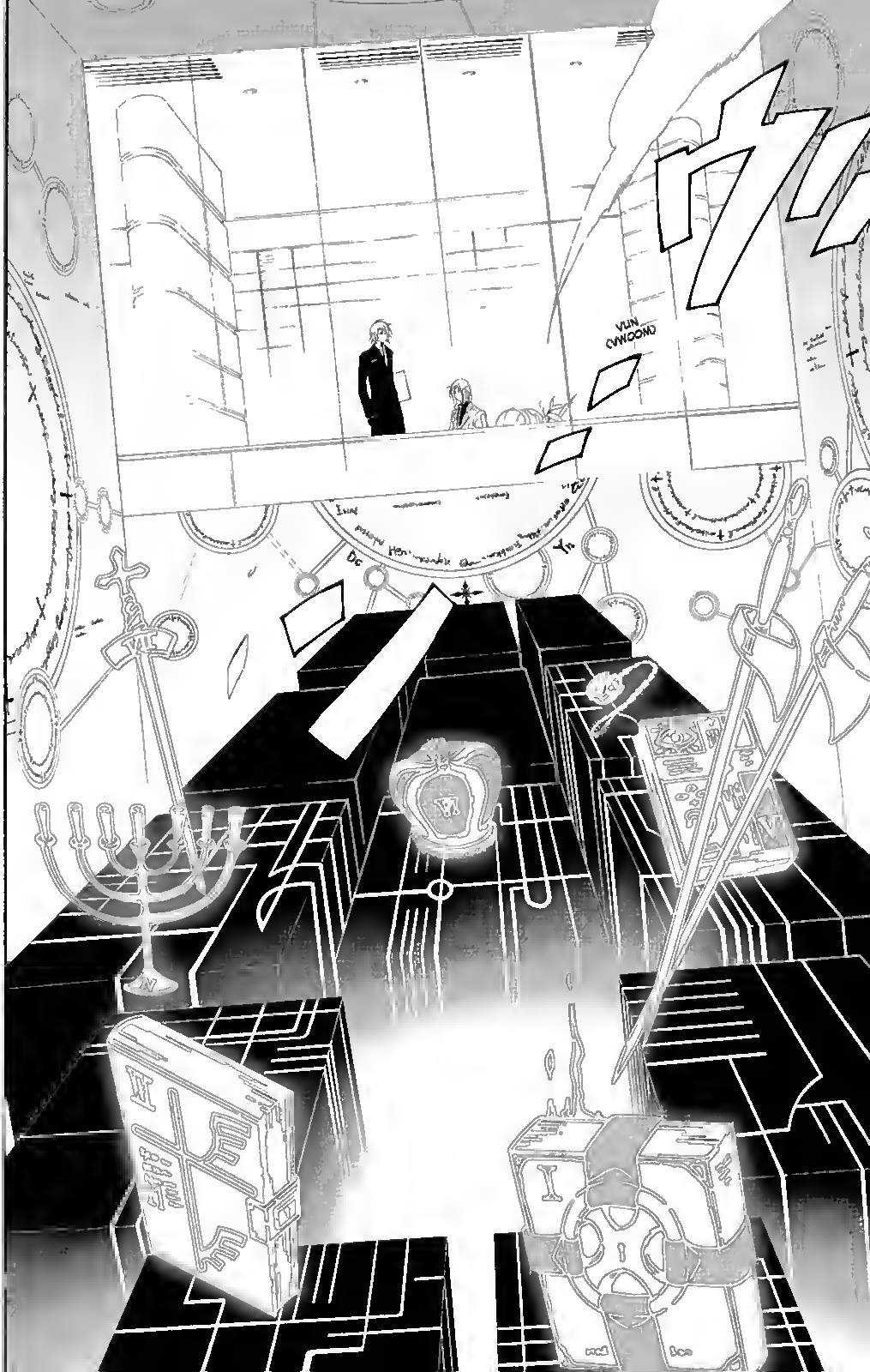

LABORATORY NO. 5
THAT WIRETAP WE PLANTED ON KANADE...
...HAS PAID OFF IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY.
A RANK AND ABOVE ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT

OUR ALLIANCE WITH TSUZUKI HAS BEEN TERMI-NATED.
WELL...
...THAT'S HARDLY AN ISSUE, SINCE WE WERE READY TO CUT TIES WITH HIM AT ANY MOMENT TOO.

I SUSPECT THEY HAVE A MUCH MORE SEVERE PUNISHMENT IN MIND FOR HIM.
MM...THEN LET'S PULL BACK.
PUTSU (BOOP)
WHAT ABOUT RIDO?
WE MAY END UP IN A FIGHT WITH KAMUHABURI OVER HIM.

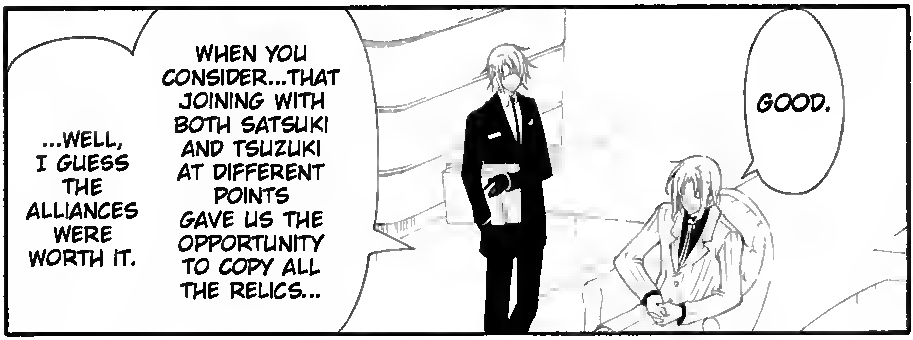

YES, SIR... IT GOES VERY WELL, OF COURSE.
HOW GOES THE *COPYING*, MAKINO-KUN?
...BACK TO BUSI-NESS.
...THAT ASIDE...

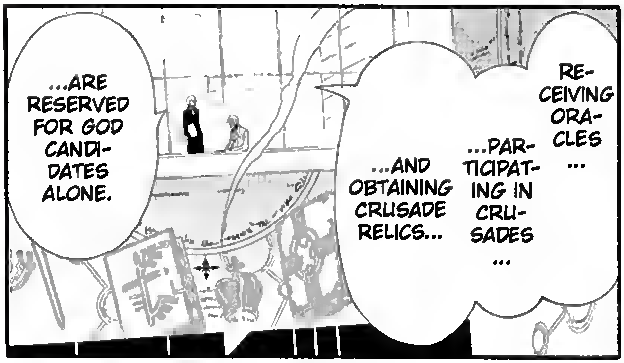

...IT MAY ALREADY BE COM-PLETE.
PI (BEEP)
ピッ
IN FACT...


VUN
CWOOM

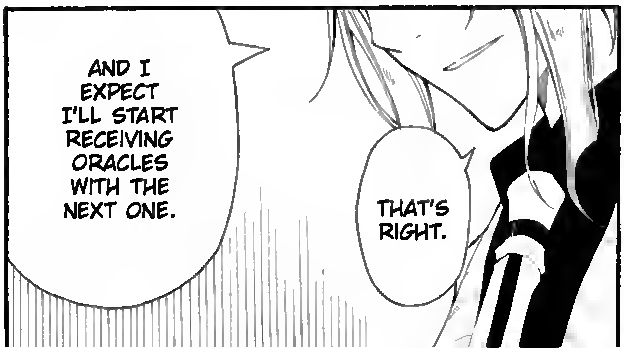
REPRODUCTIONS OF ALL EIGHT OF THE CRUSADE RELICS THAT HAVE APPEARED SO FAR.
THEY'RE VIRTUAL, NOT MATERIAL...
...BUT THEY'RE GOOD ENOUGH TO TRICK THE CRUSADE'S CORE INTO PERCEIVING THAT THE REAL ARTIFACTS ARE PRESENT.
EVEN THE TWO SATSUKI SNATCHED BEFORE THEIR CRUSADE ARE ACCOUNTED FOR.
I WAS ABLE TO MAKE A COPY...
...BY TAILING MOMOSE AND NAO BACK TO SATSUKI'S.

IN LESS THAN A MINUTE...
...THIS SCANNER WAS ABLE TO CAPTURE THE RELICS' STRUCTURAL DATA.

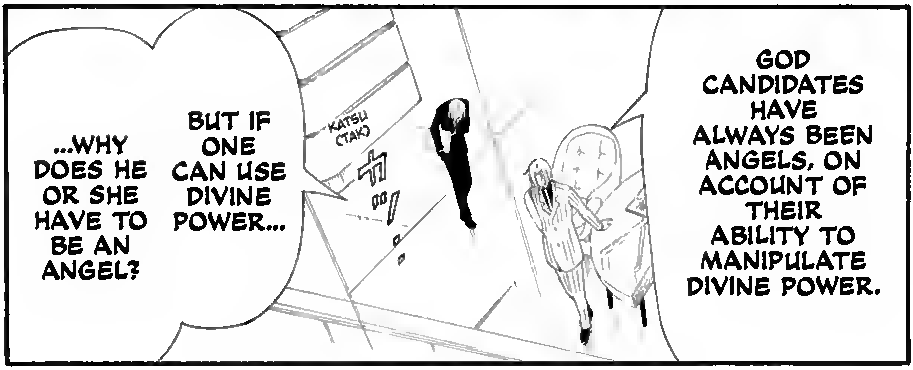

GOOD.
WHEN YOU CONSIDER...THAT JOINING WITH BOTH SATSUKI AND TSUZUKI AT DIFFERENT POINTS GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO COPY ALL THE RELICS...
...WELL, I GUESS THE ALLIANCES WERE WORTH IT.

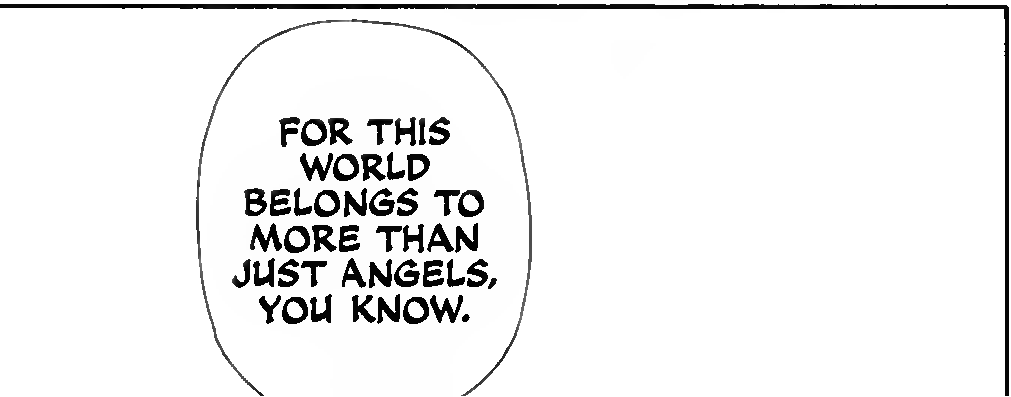

RECEIVING ORACLES ...
...PARTICIPATING IN CRUSADES ...
...AND OBTAINING CRUSADE RELICS...
...ARE RESERVED FOR GOD CANDIDATES ALONE.

POSSESSING THIS MANY CRUSADE RELICS...
...OUGHT TO BE ENOUGH FOR YOU TO BE MISTAKEN FOR A GOD CANDIDATE.


THAT'S RIGHT.
AND I EXPECT I'LL START RECEIVING ORACLES WITH THE NEXT ONE.

...RATHER, IDENTIFY-ING ME AS A THIRD GOD CANDI-DATE.
MAKING ARCANA A THIRD POWER...
...NO...


...WHY DOES HE OR SHE HAVE TO BE AN ANGEL?
BUT IF ONE CAN USE DIVINE POWER...
KATSU (TAK)
GOD CANDIDATES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ANGELS, ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR ABILITY TO MANIPULATE DIVINE POWER.


FOR THIS WORLD BELONGS TO MORE THAN JUST ANGELS, YOU KNOW.

KATSU CTAK
THINGS ARE FINALLY READY.

IT'S TIME...
...WE DEMON-FOLK MADE THE WORLD OURS.

BLOODY CROSS

HER BRAINWASHING UNDONE, TSUKIMIYA LEARNS THAT THE BLACK SEAL MARKS HER AS A CRUSADE SACRIFICE...

...AND OF TSUZUKI'S NEW ALLIANCE WITH KAMUHABURI AND SEVERED TIES TO ARCANA.

...WE COULDN'T LEAVE THE BLACK SEAL SO NEAR ARCANA...
...IS TOO MUCH MEDDLING FOR US TO BE INVOLVED WITH AS CRUSADE OVERSEERS BUT...
FRANKLY, BRAINWASHING OR SAFEGUARDING ONE WHO BEARS A BLACK SEAL...

IF SO...
...LADY TSUKIMIYA'S PROGRAMMING...
...HAS NOT YET BEEN COMPLETELY UNRAVELED.
ONLY FIVE CRUSADE RELICS REMAIN. THINGS ARE STARTING TO HEAD TOWARD THE ENDGAME!!
TH-THIS IS URGENT! SEAL OFF ALL ACCESS TO LABORATORY NUMBER 5!!
HIDE THE RELIC COPIES FROM KAMUHABURI!!

To be Continued in BLOODY CROSS Vol. 10!!

AFTERWORD COMIC STRIPS.

SOMEWHERE IN THE MOUNTAINS, AN OLD MAN STOPPED BY A RIVER TO DO LAUNDRY ON HIS WAY HOME FROM CUTTING GRASS.
AH, I'M SO BUSY.
I WISH I HAD MORE HELP.
BASHA (SPLASH)
BASHA
MY FORTUNE SAID I'D FIND A HUGE PEACH IN THE RIVER AND GAIN AN EXTRA HAND TODAY, BUT...
...SUCH AN UNREALISTIC THING COULDN'T POSSIBLY COME TRUE...
WHEW
DONBURA (BOE)
DONBURA
UTO (DOZE)
UTO
I AM INSIDE.
DUE TO THE OLD MAN'S EXTREME FATIGUE, THE PEACH WAS SPLENDIDLY IGNORED.
GAAA (SNORE)
PASSED RIGHT BY.
I AM INSIDE.
GRAB ME!
THE OLD MAN GAINED A NEW PART-TIMER.
KYUPIN (GLEAM)
YOU MAY WORSHIP ME AS YOUR MASTER!
CAFÉ GRAMPS
HE NAMED HIM "KING TARO" FOR HIS INFLATED EGO.
MEOW
PARIN (KRAKK)
WELL, GET TO WORK...
BRR!
BASHA (SPLOOSH)
HEY, IS IT SNACK TIME YET?
CAN I TAKE A NAP?
THE BOY WAS FIRED.
GO KILL SOME OGRES OR SOMETHING.
PISHA (SLIDE)

AFTER RECRUITING TWO MORE FOLLOWERS, KING TARO ARRIVED AT THE OGRE'S ISLAND.
MAKINO
HINATA
BEST IN JAPAN
THE MULTIVERSE
OKAY!
LET'S DO THIS!!
HOUSE
OGRE'S HOUSE
GACHA GACHAN
I'M WATCHING TV RIGHT NOW!
TCH
WOW! AGE?
GIMME A BREAK!
WHA...? OPEN UP!
DON
C'MON!
GASU
DON (BANG)
BATAN (SLAM)
THEY WERE REPORTED.
KING TARO DECIDED TO GO OGRE-HUNTING.
SIR! DEAR TRAVELER!
HE ENCOUNTERED A DOG.
YOU'D BE AN IDEAL MASTER!
NAO
DOG
UM... WOULD YOU PLEASE MAKE ME YOUR LACKEY?
OH! I CAN EAT ANY- AND EVERYTHING.
BTW, WHAT DO YOU USUALLY EAT OUT HERE?
YAY!
SURE! I'VE ONLY GOT THESE SWEET DUMPLINGS THAT GRAMPS MADE, BUT WANT SOME!?
DON (THUMP)
BRING IT ON!
I'M AN OMNIVORE IN ADDITION TO BEING OMNISEXUAL!
HELLO, IS THIS THE POLICE?
PAY-PHONE
SENSING DANGER, THE BOY REPORTED HIM.

BLOODY CROSS

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BLOODY CROSS 9

Shiwo Komeyama

Translation: Mari Morimoto • Lettering: Abigail Blackman

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